

GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 13

Abraham and The Folly of Homemade solutions

Genesis 16

Part 1 of 4: Faith is tested by Delay

Genesis 16:1-4a

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

1) a) Objective question. Select all that apply. What are the potential reasons for a delayed promise according to the video lecture?

- A. To make us holy
- B. To prepare us
- C. To strengthen our faith
- D. To make us earn for it
- E. To reveal a weakness
- F. To benefit those who are watching us
- G. To purge us of pride
- H. To test our patience
- I. To provide what is best, not what is immediate
- J. To reveal our priorities
- K. To demonstrate His love

The Human Response to a Delay of fulfilling a promise

- Delay stimulates our natural impatience
- Delay leads to disappointment
- Delay threatens our faith in God's promises
- Delay causes an underestimation of God

- Delay tempts us to doubt God
- Delay tempts us to act unilaterally

b) Reflection question. We saw that Sarai behaved in the ways listed above when the promise of having a child was delayed. There were other factors that affected her behavior such as culture, emotions, public perception, legal acceptance of certain practices, and the perception that God is mean. How are we as Christians supposed to treat these factors in light of God's promises to us?

Pressure from	Modern examples	How we should respond
Culture		
Emotions		
Public perception		
Legal acceptance of certain (sinful)practices		
The perception that God is mean (from self and others)		

Relevant Verses

Isaiah 30:1

“Woe to the obstinate children,”
 declares the Lord,
 “to those who carry out plans that are not mine,
 forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit,
 heaping sin upon sin;

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the Lord;
 be strong and take heart
 and wait for the Lord.

Psalm 38:15

Lord, I wait for you;
 you will answer, Lord my God.

Part 2 of 4: Delay tempts us to act unilaterally

Gen 16:4b-5

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

2) Discussion question. If having a slave bear a child for you (slave surrogate) is a legal and culturally acceptable practice back then, why was it wrong? (answers in lecture slides as well)

Relevant Verses

Proverbs 30:21-23

"Under three things the earth trembles,
under four it cannot bear up:
a servant who becomes king,
a godless fool who gets plenty to eat,
a contemptible woman who gets married,
and a servant who displaces her mistress.

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Part 3 of 4: God is the God who hears and sees the Oppressed

Genesis 16:6-16

"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

The angel of the Lord also said to her:

“You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the Lord has heard of your misery.
He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone’s hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
toward all his brothers.”

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael

3) Discussion question. Hagar was a foreigner, a woman, a slave, vulnerable, in trouble, and a victim, yet our God is a God that sees and hears the oppressed. What are the ways we can do to see people the way God sees them?

Part 4 of 4: Though we are unfaithful, God is always faithful

Galatians 4:21-26, 28-29, 5:1,13-14

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

...Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now....

...It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery...

... You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

4) Reflection question. Hagar's son represents human effort and slavery whereas Sarah's son represented freedom and God's divine promise. God will be faithful in keeping us free from the yoke of slavery, however on a scale of 0-100%, how would you rate yourself in terms of using your freedom to love others in an average week? Has it improved from the previous few years or months?

"Never confuse a single mistake with a final mistake." Scott Fitzgerald.

Take Away

Part 1 of 4: Faith is tested by Delay

Part 2 of 4: Delay tempts us to act unilaterally

Part 3 of 4: God is the God who hears and sees the Oppressed

Part 4 of 4: Though we are unfaithful, God is always faithful

Case Study

Case 1 – In-vitro Fertilization

Ken and Florence are a couple in their mid-30s who regularly attend the Second Baptist Church. They have been married for 12 years since they were 25. Ever since then, they have been trying to conceive a child.

Florence was particularly downcast after attempting for so long and they were not successful in having children. Ken suggested that they tried in-vitro fertilization (a.k.a. test tube babies). [In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a complex series of procedures used to help with fertility or prevent genetic problems and assist with the conception of a child.]

However, Florence has been to Delta class at the Second Baptist Church and remembers that

in Genesis 16, Abraham and Sarah were faced with barrenness too and that they made a mistake by resorting to their own methods to have a son.

She is unsure if resorting to IVF is doing things her own way instead of God's way and is hesitant to commit to it. Nevertheless, she accepted that it may be a possibility for her to never have any children.

1) a) Discussion question. How was Florence's situation similar to Abram and Sarai's in Genesis 16?

b) Discussion question. How was Florence's situation different from Abram and Sarai's in Genesis 16?

c) Objective question. Which of the following was Abram's mistake?

- A. Abram's mistake was to have a child through his wife's handmaid, Hagar (as a surrogate mother)
- B. Abram's mistake was to try to bring God's promise into effect through his own means

d) Discussion question. Why was it a mistake?

e) Discussion question. In Florence's situation, was she finding her identity in having children?

f) Discussion question. In view of the above, is in-vitro fertilization an acceptable for Ken and Florence?

Case 2 – The Bible is “Morally Incorrect”

Zack is an atheist who attended Alpha but has not been receptive to the Gospel of Christ. When asked why, he objects to the authority of the Bible. After reading Genesis and the story of Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, he claims that the Bible is teaching morally incorrect evil themes. “This story demeans women, condones slavery, and holds up people who act despicably as spiritual heroes!” – Zack, 2022

2) a) Discussion question. Is Zack's observation correct?

b) Discussion question. Does the Bible highlight the goodness of demeaning women and slavery? Or does the Bible highlight the destruction it brings?

c) Discussion question. Does the Bible condone slavery? Why or why not?

d) Discussion question. Is the Bible a series of moral stories? Or is it a record of how God redeems a lost mankind?

Case 3 – Mormons and Polygamy

“Beginning of polygamy

Founded by Joseph Smith in 1830, the Mormon movement from its beginnings offered a unique perspective on the religious role of men.

One of the most influential events in the life of Joseph Smith was the death of his 25-year-old brother Alvin in 1823. In 1836, Joseph Smith had a vision of Alvin Smith in heaven. Based on this vision, he developed the Mormon teaching that families could be together in heaven if they underwent religious rites – called “sealings” – in Mormon temples. Any faithful Mormon approved by church leaders could perform these sealings.

Due in part to this powerful role it gave to men in helping to save the people they loved and brought to heaven, Mormonism attracted proportionally more male converts than any other American religious movement of the time.

In the early 1830s, Smith extended this view of the role of men to include polygamy as it was practiced by Old Testament prophets like Abraham. Smith taught that a righteous man could help numerous women and children go to heaven by being “sealed” in plural marriage. Large families multiplied a man’s glory in the afterlife. This teaching was established as doctrine in 1843.”

Article Source: <https://theconversation.com/explaining-polygamy-and-its-history-in-the-mormon-church-81384>

3) Discussion question. Does the Bible condone polygamy in the Old Testament? Why or why not?