

# Wearied with Waiting

Gen 16

**Call:** Is 40:28-29, 31

**Scripture:** Lam 3:24-26

## I. Introduction

The French Philosopher Simone Weil once said, "Waiting in [hopeful] expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life." I don't know about you, but I don't like to wait. I am very impatient. Waiting wearies me. And the culture here doesn't help, for here in the West, our culture is an instant gratification culture. More and more in our world, we expect instant communication, instant answers and instant relief from any discomfort, plus our credit card culture simply "takes the waiting out of wanting" (Guinness, 85). Waiting now seems so strange and unnatural to us. Wait? We don't have time to do that! But, therein lies the paradox: waiting can be wearisome, but so can our busy and crazy lives in Silicon Valley. We not only grow weary with waiting, we grow weary from the pace of our lives. It's fantastic to have Robert with us today. Our trips to Liberia always remind me of the famous African saying, "All westerners have watches. Africans have time" (Guinness, 50). Maybe you're here today and you are weary with waiting. But, maybe you're here today and you are weary from other reasons: weary from heavy anxiety, from fierce temptation, from loneliness, from overwork, from lack of work, from caring for little ones, caring for older ones, or from crisis after crisis after crisis. Whatever the source of your weariness, our text today holds out great hope for you.

## Review

In today's text, we find our couple, Abram and Sarai wearied with waiting. God had made extraordinary promises to Abram and Sarai, but It's been ten long years with no hint of fulfillment. Ten minutes is hard enough for me. And, Abram and Sarai have grown weary with waiting. So, we find in this text, desperate people facing a desperate situation and doing what desperate people do in desperate situations. And, their actions are still shaping our world 4000 years later.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, Genesis 16:1-6.

## II. Wearied Action (16:1-6)

*1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. 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. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! 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!” 6 But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. (ESV)*

### **A. The Context**

Wow. What a heart-breaking scene. In verse 2, we get Sarai’s first recorded words in the story, and they are shot through with pain and desperation. You can imagine Sarai each week hoping against hope that she would become pregnant. As these promises continue to be repeated to Abram, she continues to feel like a failure. Couple that with the fact that barrenness in that time was considered a curse. It was a humiliation for the woman, an absolute catastrophe, and, interestingly, the most common cause of divorce during that time (Walton, 68). But, even more, the delay and apparent failure of the promise causes her to act. What are her words? *“The Lord has prevented me from bearing children” (16:2)*. In other words, God don’t you see me? Don’t you see my pain? You can hear the desperation in her voice. She must do something to relieve her pain. She’s waited long enough. So, she takes control and acts, and her actions set in motion the most hostile conflict in world history.

We are in the same boat, aren’t we? We, too, are waiting for the fulfillment of a promise, aren’t we? We too face the delay and apparent failure of a promise, don’t we? Jesus said that he would return to fully establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In Revelation, he says to John, *“Behold, I am coming soon”* (Rev 22:12). And, how long has it been? 2000 years. And, we continue to wait patiently with eyes lifted up.

### **B. Helping God?**

Abram and Sarai, weary with waiting, take matters into their own hands. They are afraid, and then act out of that fear. We saw the same thing happen in chapter 12. Due to the famine, Abram and Sarai bolt for Egypt. In that case, Abram feared and acted out of fear. Here, Sarai fears and acts out of her fear. She concocts a foolish plan to “help” God.

Which raises the question - does the living God need our help to do anything? No. The living God needs no help to fulfill his promises. Participation, yes; help, no. Abram and Sarai’s scheming only revealed a lack of confidence in God’s ability to fulfill his promises. So, they strike out on their own to make things happen themselves.

We have a family value here at PBCC called “Participation in God’s Work.” This value means we are to be available to what God is doing in the world, then participate with him in his work. God wants our participation in his work, but he doesn’t need us. John the Baptist said that God could take these stones and raise up children for Abraham (Matt 3:9). Abram and Sarai’s scheming reveal that they have far too high a confidence in their own abilities and far too low a confidence in God’s abilities.

AW Tozer, the famous 20<sup>th</sup> century pastor said this:

Almighty God, just because He is almighty, needs no support. The picture of a nervous, ingratiating God fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one; yet if we look

at the popular conception of God, that is precisely what we see. Twentieth century Christianity has put God on charity. So lofty is our opinion of ourselves that we find it quite easy, not to say enjoyable, to believe that we are necessary to God. But the truth is that God is not greater for our being, nor would He be less if we did not exist. That we do exist is altogether of God's free determination...

Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. (Tozer, loc 540)

We think far too highly of ourselves, especially in our time of technological advancements. We give ourselves far too much credit!

### **C. The Cultural Expectations?**

Well, the steps that Sarai takes, although strange to our ears, are legal and expected during that time. Remember that during that time, the survival of the family was the highest value for parents. This is what drove people. And, the steps taken by Sarai are found in ancient laws, called the Laws of Hammurabi. These laws stipulated that if a wife could not produce a son to carry on the family line, she "was to present one of her slave-girls to her husband to bear a son for the marriage" (Baldwin, 58). Now, how any wife could be held responsible to bear a son is beyond me. But, if this situation happens, the wife, not the slave-girl, held authority over the child. The slave-girl was simply a surrogate mother and nothing more.

What Sarai chose to do was legally and culturally acceptable, but it violated the sacred covenant of marriage. Abram and Sarai are letting the culture dictate their actions. And, in doing so, they break the sacred covenant of marriage. And going against God's ways backfires, as it always does, ruining relationships and breaking community.

And, here we learn a valuable lesson: what is legal and culturally acceptable might very well go against God's ways. And, this is a real danger for us. As we talked about in our summer series, we are very easily influenced by our culture. We very easily base our ethical decisions on the way things are, not on the way things ought to be. What we forget is the way things are in a broken world are not the way things ought to be. After all modern values are defined more by public opinion than anything else. What is legal in a fallen world may not be righteous before God.

It's legal and acceptable to have an abortion, but it's not right before God. It's legal and acceptable to spew hate language on-line, but it's not right before God. It's legal and acceptable to have sex outside of marriage, but it's not right before God. Notice Hagar is now considered Abram's wife because of sex. Sex equals marriage in God's eyes. What is legal and culturally acceptable may not be righteous in God's eyes. And, we have to be aware of this as we go about our daily lives.

#### **D. The Fall Re-run**

So, Sarai, wearied with waiting, sees the problem and follows the culture of her time. She gives Hagar to Abram to produce a son. And, Abram, says, "As you wish dear." Abram quietly complies. Notice the verbs in this scene, verse three: took and gave. Sarai *took* Hagar and *gave* her to Abram. Those same verbs are found in Genesis 3, the story of the fall. Eve *took* the fruit and *gave* it to Adam who was with her. The author of Genesis is drawing an intentional connection between chapter 3 and here. In other words, Chapter 16 is the "fall re-run" (Wenham, 7).

Sarai, out of her deep pain – and we feel her pain – takes matters into her own hands to help God. But, she does not anticipate the results. As Joyce Baldwin notes, "What Sarai had not bargained for was the emotional upheaval which the new situation would involve. Though the Law of Hammurabi did not allow for the slave-girl to exalt herself to the same status as the wife, Hagar was given a new status and a new hope, which legislation was powerless to crush" (Baldwin, 58). Sarai simply assumed that Hagar would agree to be the surrogate and walk away. Become pregnant, carry the baby for nine months, give birth, then walk away with no emotional connection. It's not that easy! Hagar wasn't prepared to follow the law of the land. She sees that she has conceived, then looks with contempt on Sarai. She saw that she had one-upped Sarai and began to disrespect her. Many years later, Proverbs 30 uses the same language in forbidding Hagar's reaction (30:21-23). After the conflict in the home becomes too much for Sarai, Sarai complains to Abram. "You deal with her," she says. Abram does nothing, throwing the responsibility back on Sarai. Sarai responds by treating Hagar abusively, which causes Hagar to flee while pregnant. What a heart-breaking scene!

#### **E. Lacking Prayer?**

And, as we look back over this scene, do you notice what is missing from this entire scene? A seeking after God's voice. Abram and Sarai do not consult God with their plan. Sarai listens to the culture. Abram, like Adam, listens to the voice of his wife. Neither of them listen for the voice of God. In other words, neither of them take time to pray.

It is a dangerous sign when the people of God are not seeking his guidance in prayer. It's a dangerous sign when prayer is not the natural reflex of our hearts. What was the one thing that stood out to the followers of Jesus? He prayed. He was always sneaking away to consult his heavenly Father. He prayed so much that the only thing the disciples are recorded as asking Jesus to teach them is how to pray. Teach us how to pray Jesus! They don't ask him to teach them how to preach, or evangelize, or counsel, or to do church. They are recorded as asking Jesus to teach them only one thing: teach us to pray. They saw that the natural reflex of Jesus' heart was to seek the mind of his father in heaven.

Is prayer the natural reflex of your heart?

Not praying is a sign that we are living as if God doesn't exist. Not praying means we are living our lives without reference to the living God. And, by definition, that's atheism. Now, we know that Abram and Sarai trust God. We've seen it throughout our studies this fall. We know that

they are friends of God, so they are not atheists, to use a term from our time period for them. But, in this scene, they are living as practical atheists. What does that mean? Well, a practical atheist is someone who believes in the living God, but who lives the everyday business of life just like an atheist, without reference to that same God. In fact, many practical atheists today believe in the living God. They believe that the living God came to earth, born of a virgin, lived 30+ years on this planet, was crucified on a Roman cross and rose again on the third day. But, in the everyday business of life, they act as though what they say they believe is not true. They live without reference to God. That's practical atheism.

Practical atheism is alive and well today in the church in the West. How do I know that? Because I am example A. I live out practical atheism frequently. It seems to sneak up on me when I'm not looking. I'm going through my day, thinking I am trusting the living God, when all of a sudden, I respond to anxiety or worries or disappointment just like the rest of the world, without any reference to God. I hate it! I respond as if I have never met Jesus.

And, it doesn't help that practical atheism is deeply embedded in every area of our western culture – in political life, in science and technology, in the economy, in the education system. And, because it is so embedded in every area of our lives, it is not always evident how big of a danger it is for us. It's interesting that we typically think of "worldliness" in terms of temptations to sex, drugs and rock-n-roll, or even to social ills such as racism or oppression. And, yes, that certainly does help define worldliness. But, what if the very heart of worldliness is not personal immorality or social injustice, but the exclusion of God from the everyday business of life? What if the very heart of worldliness is living our everyday lives, Monday to Saturday, without reference to the living God? (Most of this paragraph is from Craig Gay, 3-4.)

It is a sign of practical atheism when we do not begin the day by listening to the voice of God, and then don't consult him throughout the day. It is a sign of practical atheism when we do not seek the mind of the Father. It is a sign of practical atheism when we are too busy or are unwilling to pray. Maybe all the busy-ness and crazy-ness of our silicon valley lives is not the will of God.

Abram and Sarai are practical atheists in this scene, because they do not consult the living God in whom they claim to believe. They trust themselves, take matters into their own hands, thinking they know best. And, the consequences are heart-breaking.

So, that's the first scene. Let's move to the second scene, beginning with verse 7.

### **III. God sees the Weary (16:7-16)**

*7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, 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.*

*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.*

### **A. The Context**

This is an astonishing scene. Remember that Hagar is a pregnant, vulnerable, slave girl, and now refugee. She has no legal rights whatsoever, simply a pawn for Sarai’s scheming. When Sarai turns abusive, Hagar prefers the dangers of the wilderness over continuing with life in the family community. Wow! So, Hagar heads for home, for Egypt. Shur is on the way to Egypt which is presumably where home is for Hagar. We can assume Hagar was obtained while Abram and Sarai were in Egypt in chapter 12.

### **B. The Discovery**

But now, excluded from the family community, fleeing into the wilderness, Hagar has to be weary with life, weary with the unfairness of life, weary from all of her circumstances. You have to feel for her.

What was Hagar thinking out there all alone in the wilderness? Should I get rid of the child, especially since the father had not defended her or the child in the conflict? Should I sell myself to another master so I can get food and protection? Should I simply stay out here until I die?

But, in that moment of ultimate weariness and ultimate loneliness, this pregnant vulnerable slave girl refugee is encountered by God. And, in this encounter, Hagar makes the discovery of a lifetime. She discovers that the living God is the God of the vulnerable and the weary and the lonely.

Remarkably, this is the first appearance of the angel of the Lord in the Bible, and it is to a pregnant vulnerable slave girl refugee. The angel of the Lord finds her. “Finding” is a word whose foundational meaning is searching for, not accidentally stumbling upon. We find out later that this angel is God himself. God himself has actively sought out Hagar, finding her taking refuge at a well in the wilderness.

In this most desperate of situations, the living God seeks out and finds this pregnant vulnerable slave girl refugee. A nobody! Yet, God searches for her and finds her. Remarkably, God addresses her by name, something Abram and Sarai never do. He asks her two questions, where have you come from and where are going? Notice she can't answer the future question. She doesn't know where she is going. It is then that God gives her a glimpse into her future, a future she most likely had not envisioned. Isn't this remarkable? Hagar is like Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist in that she receives God's revelation in the wilderness.

She will have many descendants. God also assures her that he will bless her and her son, Ishmael. Ishmael, though blessed, will not be the son of promise, for God does not say that all nations on earth will be blessed through him. That promise is for the son of promise, Isaac. God has made a covenant with the line of Isaac, not Ishmael. But the good news is that the seed of Isaac, namely Jesus, comes for Ishmael and all of his descendants as well. The seed of promise from Isaac comes for both the Jews and the Arabs.

It is apparent that this God delights in showing mercy and providing relief to the vulnerable and the weary and the lonely, but there is still responsibility for Hagar. She must return, because the baby is Abram's baby too.

### **C. Hagar's Response**

And, how does she respond? Hagar's response publicly confesses that God is the "Seeing God," becoming the only person in the Old Testament to "confer a name on God" (Waltke, 255). The sense of her confession is that this God sees us first in our condition before we see him in our lives. He is the seeing God. The scene ends with Hagar, filled with hope, obeying God, turning in her tracks and returning. What a scene!

## **IV. Implication: Hope for the Weary**

Are you weary today in your life?

In our text today, the weariness with waiting has resulted in Sarai without respect, Hagar without a home and Abram in heartache for a hurting wife and a house of conflict. We see real people, living in the real world, dealing with real problems, and really blowing it. And, their actions have had dire consequences in our world.

And, yet, there is hope.

Hope is found in a "Seeing God." A God who sees us in our circumstances. He sees Sarai in her waiting. He sees Hagar in her loneliness. He also sees all of the powerless: the vulnerable, the enslaved, the refugee, the lonely and also the weary. God's eyes are actively seeking, looking, searching for an eye to eye encounter. Jesus speaks of the same God who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search everywhere for that one lost sheep. Or, the woman who literally tears her house apart looking for that one lost coin. Or, the Father scanning the horizon everyday looking for his lost son to come home. You know, that son who wanted his father dead so he could

have the inheritance, and ran away only to become a lonely vulnerable slave boy refugee. And, one day, the Father, after years of scanning the horizon, finally sees a figure emerge. And, he gathers his robe, a scandalous thing to do by a distinguished older man, and runs to his lost and lonely son and embraces him and kisses him (Lk 15).

Jesus even identifies himself as the one who searches for and seeks and saves those who are lost (Matt 18:11). You never need to question whether God sees you. He is the seeing God.

Last week, I asked if you could say Amen to Jesus, effectively saying you trust him at his word. I know for some of you that was a difficult thing to do, maybe not even possible. And, I want you to know that that's ok. God sees you whether you can say amen to him or not. The living God is the seeing God.

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, we are called to participate with what God is doing in the world. We are called to live with reference to him in every step of our life. We are called to wait patiently for him, for "waiting in hopeful expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life." And, all of that implies trusting him, throwing our entire weight upon him. And, when we do that, we live in hope of what the seeing God will most certainly do, according to his promises in Jesus Christ. He will come back, and he will establish his kingdom on earth, so we trust God to be God, because he needs no help. Amen.

### **Benediction, adapted from an ancient prayer for guidance:**

This week,  
may you live and move and have your being in Him  
And may he guide you and govern you by his Spirit  
So that in all the cares and occupations of your life  
You will not forget him  
And you will remember that you are ever walking in his sight;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

### **Resources**

Tozer, AW. *Knowledge of the Holy*  
Baldwin, Joyce. *The Message of Genesis 12-50 (The Bible Speaks Today Series)*  
Gay, Craig. *The Way of the Modern World*  
Guinness, Os. *The Last Christian on Earth*  
Waltke, Bruce. *Genesis: A Commentary*  
Walton, John. *Genesis (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)*  
Wenham, Gordon. *Genesis 16-50, Volume 2 (Word Biblical Commentary)*