

## The God Who Hears and Sees ▪ Genesis 16

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Life is a series of peaks and valleys.

There is no other way to explain living in a world that is both blessed and has strong remnants of the curse remaining.

For example, one day can be utterly amazing.

The sun shines brightly, everyone is nice and pleasant to you.

There is no conflict in your life.

Every task you set out is done and done well.

You sleep soundly.

Another day can be the exact opposite: cloudy and cold, people are rude and ignore you.

You are at odds with people closest to you.

Nothing seems to work. Several things break, debt seems to be piling up.

And the anxiety makes it hard to ever shut off.

Or, the peaks and valleys in our behavior:

In a single day. I can feel like God really used me in a counseling situation in the morning. I can have a lunch meeting and really encourage a brother.

Only to come home, and grow impatient with my family.

I say things that do not build up, and let unwise or angry words come out that I need to ask forgiveness.

What a moral contradiction!

-Sometimes our faith can soar high one moment then suddenly plunge the next.

-We can fluctuate between steadfastness and shortcuts.

\*This is the book of Genesis and the characters: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Sarah

—Abraham's Life: Sovereign call, strong faith...followed by personal failure, foolishness.

- If Gen. 15 is a peak, Gen. 16 is back into a valley.
- Now you may think that this story in Gen. 16 is about two women: Sarah and Hagar; or maybe a love triangle—but that would miss the point.

The story is about God, specifically a God who hears and sees.

*The Major Lesson: God Is Always Hearing and Seeing People in Distress.*

- There is also a major lesson on that way: life gets more complicated when people fail to have faith.
- › There is a danger in taking shortcuts.

\*Not all shortcuts are safe.

*Sometimes the long way is the safest way.*

Let' turn now to the God who hears & sees:

### **The God who hears (1-12)**

- This story is almost a mirror of chapter 12—except the characters are flipped.
- In Gen. 12, second half: Abraham's faith is tested by a famine.
- In this account it starts off with Sarah's faith tested: with a barren womb.

This is the first time in Gen we hear Sarah's voice.

*This narrative is driven by saltiness.*

| Here's an example: one of the girls in my house has a sweatshirt that says *Don't Be Salty*.

I've lived inside the Christian world for so long that I initially thought it was unbiblical. Jesus said to be, what? Salt and Light.

But this is a different salty.

Salty person: jealous, foul, rude, shocking behavior

*Salty Things. What are they?*

### 1) Contradictions (1-4a)

- Moral contradictions.
- V2. Sarah has very sound theology, doesn't she?
- In a conversation about the birds and bees, she brings in the Lord's sovereign hand.

*The LORD has prevented me from bearing children.*

It takes a good level of maturity to be able to see God in all things...*even the things he denies us.*

To be able to say, "The LORD has done this/prevented this...and he is still good".

So far, so good! .....until you read the 2nd half of the verse.

- The solution is not....

*Instead, a short cut is taken.*

- Sarah has a plan to borrow the reproductive organs of her female slave so she can get her child.

What Sarah suggested was common at the time: surrogate maternity.

...And Abram, the great hero of our faith....goes along?!?!

- In an interesting twist, Abraham and Sarah seem to be acting in a way that Adam and Eve did in Gen. 3...

A few echoes of Adam's fall in Gen 3.

—First, found in the verbs (v3) “took and gave”.

Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she *took* of its fruit and ate, and she also *gave* some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

(Gen. 3:6) - Eve...not driven by trust in God's Word “took and gave”.

—Also,

- Abraham going along is like Adam (v2b) - “Abraham listened to the voice of his wife”.
- The same phrase is found in the words of Judgment when Adam obeyed Eve (3:17).

Genesis 3:17 (ESV)

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...

No one is acting in strong faith there!

*Things are getting salty; it gets' saltier.*

## 2) Contempt (4b-6)

- Two things happen to Hagar: She becomes *pregnant*, and becomes *proud*.
- This is more than just the jealousy of two women.

There is a serious legal issue at stake.

- Once Hagar becomes Abraham’s concubine and bears him a child—she feels her status is elevated.

Proverbs observes how this is an utter disaster.

**Proverbs 30:21 ESV**

Under three things the earth trembles;  
under four it cannot bear up:

Proverbs 30:23 (ESV)

....a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.

There is a lesson here for us.

Pride can creep in so seductively and then take over swiftly.

There is a reason why so many who gain popularity and fame too rapidly can’t handle it.

Success can easily be a person’s greatest downfall..

- What might just sound like an angry vent (v5) is really an appeal for justice.

The outcome of Abraham’s verdict: Hagar is returned to slave status—and is humiliated and abused. Things are extremely salty.

- We don’t know what all the abuse entailed. Was it verbal, physical, emotional, or a r combo of all? What we do know is that it’s the same verb used in in 15:13 for the affliction that Israel will face in Egypt.

Hagar fled —she starts heading back toward her homeland Egypt.

- Now it would seem the story would get saltier....if it were not for a Sovereign God who Hears and Sees.

Think also about your own salty situations? Maybe your own fault, maybe a result of others. or a mix.

What if God just left us?

What if there were no such thing as grace?

- V7 has grace all wrapped around it!

One commentator: “The LORD was out there in the wilderness looking for the wanderer.” (Iain Dugguid)

*God waits and seeks after the wanderer.*

- This is the first time we encounter the “Angel of the LORD”.

### Angel of the LORD

—Now some view the angel of the LORD as literally an angel. —Since the angel has such distinct qualities that Hagar thinks she encounters God, many have viewed this as pre-incarnate Christ.

- The first thing the Angel tells here: go back.

In our culture where people love to hold onto the victim card ..this seems shocking. But this is what the LORD says.

(BTW\_—This does not mean that a woman in an abusive relationship is supposed to remain; that’s wrong application.)

Hagar is not a pure victim: she provoked this.

Yet this is a reminder that whatever structures of authority God has put in our lives—they need to be honored. IN the Family, Church, Employment, Government.

*Whether we like the situation or person in authority.*

- She is told to go back and return to her slavery...(a very important part of the narrative to remember for later!)
- But she is blessed (11-12); similar to the Abrahamic blessings.

- Biblical names carry a meaning: Ishmael means God hears—we will come back to him later in Gen.
- But the prophetic words ring true of his character.

The encounter that Hagar has here shows her encountering a personal God.

(V8) —She is called by name. Not “hey you”; “Hey woman”; “slave”.

The takeaway: God is not a deaf, distant, disconnected deity; ...he is one who draws close and hears.

Think about how this shapes prayer.

*Q: What do you imagine when you pray?*

The Psalms are so vital for praying—for they teach us to imagine a God who is attentive and hears:

**Psalm 69:33 ESV**

For the LORD hears the needy  
and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.

One of the keys to bearing witness in this secular age is to live as if we really believe God is personal; that he really hears us, hears prayer.

He hears prayers, knows names.

**The God who sees (13-15)**

- This last section is very much the climax of the story: why? Hagar does what we all should do before God: Worship (V13).
- › The wanderer has now been turned into a worshiper!
- She actually does something strange that you never see again: Gives God a name (v13).
- God seeing is a symbolic way to remind us that *he provides*.

Through this episode—this dark valley of disappointment— there is a God who sees, who provides for people who look to him.

That gives us confidence.

Keep looking and trusting in his hand of provision.

- › *Trust what his eyes see and what His hand provides, even if it's a time of affliction .*

### Gospel:

Now think of Hagar for a moment again.

She went from slave, to free, back to slave again. Probably not something she would have chosen.

It is hard to go from highly exalted, to humble slave.

Yet that's the story of Jesus.

### **Philippians 2:6–7 ESV**

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

But there is a key difference between Jesus and Hagar. *Hagar's slavery was not able to set herself or anyone else free.*

- › Compare that to Jesus—*he willingly, freely, and lovingly subjected himself to slavery.*
- › *His included abuse, affliction, crucifixion, death—the cross was no shortcut of faith!*

...And he did it so you and I can be free.

- Paul in his letter to Galatians uses the story of Hagar to show us that the very gospel that comes to us is a gospel of freedom.

Free from the penalty and power of sin.



### **Galatians 4:31–5:1 ESV**

So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The God who hears and sees has worked all things in history to set people free through the gospel.

- › This is a call for some: you don't have to wander, you don't have to return to slavery like Hagar.
- › Good News: You can be free! Free from eternal penalty death and enslaving power of sin.

Believe in the amazing promise of Christ today.

### Conclusion:

We have seen today that God Hears, Sees, and Set's free.

Are you trusting this God with your entire life today?

Are you taking any shortcuts that sidestep faith?

Are you living in the freedom that Jesus has won?

- › God does not want us to wander into shortcuts and slavery.

May we live with ever increasing trust in our God who hears and sees, and the joy of freedom that Christ calls us to.