

98-12-13a Genesis Chapter 16 verse 1-16 Attitudes of Hagar and Sarai Custom

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to Psalm 139. Psalm 139. We anticipate in this psalm a theme that we will find in the section of Genesis that we studied this morning, which is God's watch care, His active oversight and intervention in the lives of individual believers.

Psalm 139. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up.

You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

You have hedged me behind and before and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high.

I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall fall on me, even the night shall be light about me. Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from you, but the night shines as the day.

The darkness and the light are both alike to you. For you formed my inward parts. You covered me in my mother's womb.

I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed, and in your book they all were written. The days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand.

When I awake, I am still with you. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men, for they speak against you wickedly. Your enemies take your name in vain.

Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate you? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and

know my heart.

Try me and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We sometimes can get the impression, whether it's conscious or subconscious, that the plan of God is large in scope and breadth. It spans history. It spans the great biblical figures that we all have studied.

And by comparison, we find ourselves, at least in our own estimation, to be insignificant. Looking at what God has done with Israel, looking at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, and His life and His death and resurrection, and the ministry of the apostles and so forth, and we think there have been so many billions of people on the planet. You look around today and there are, as you know, I was quite philosophical when I get up in an airplane and look down, and the tremendous number of houses and cars and people.

If you fly at night and you look down and see the lights dotting the landscape and you realize, you begin to get an impression of just how big the planet is and how many people there are. And you start thinking, like it says in Job and in the Psalms, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him. Particularly in our individual case, we think, well, my particular life, my particular circumstance, how can it be that big of a deal? How can it make much of a difference in the grand scheme of God? But in this psalm, we see the individual attention that God pays to believers.

This is a psalm of David, and we think, well, if David was the king of Israel, maybe that's why God paid such close attention to him. But this is a worship song of Israel. This is a song that went into the hymnal, just like the hymns we sang this morning.

And it provides the perspective that each believer in all the different phases of history should have and that we ourselves should have. God is individually and specifically concerned with your life and with my life. He knows all of the details, and he knew them before we were even born.

When we were yet unformed, he mapped out our days, he mapped out our circumstances, the specific challenges, the specific people, the specific blessings, as well as the trials were all carefully crafted by God for each of us. And there is nothing that happens without his knowledge, and there are opportunities where he waits for us to look to him for intervention. So this is a great thought to begin our study this morning as we turn back to Genesis chapter 16, where we begin a new episode in the unfolding life of Abraham, the patriarch and father of the nation of Israel.

We have spent the last two Sundays on the personal manifestation of God's presence as Abraham cuts the animals and the smoking pot and the burning torch appear to confirm the promises God has made to Abraham and also to confirm the more detailed revelation of how these promises will be fulfilled. There is a principle that is spoken of most often, I

think, in seminaries. We don't find it aired out too much in other places, but the idea of the unfolding of God's plan, the progress of revelation is what they call it in classrooms when you're looking at the Bible as a whole, that early on you have the nucleus or the general statement of what is going to happen in God's plan.

And then through the books of the Bible, through the unfolding of the history and the outworking of God's plan, we get more and more detail. So in the garden when God speaks to Adam and Eve and the serpent and he talks about the bruising of the head and the bruising of the heel, there's not a lot of detail, in fact there isn't any detail about how that will take place. But as history unfolds, as biblical revelation unfolds, we have more and more specifics.

What's the first promise that God makes to Abram? He's still back in Ur of the Chaldees and God says, depart your country and kindred and so forth and go to this land and I will make of you a great nation. God has confirmed that promise a time or two since then, but in the last chapter we saw that there is more detail. He says I am going to do this, but there's going to be some intervening dark time.

Remember the darkness that falls on Abram and the fear and horror that falls upon him? And you have this spooky scene where in the midst of these dead and bisected animals, the smoking pot as well as the lighted torch passes between the pieces. We noted that fascinating detail that the verb is in the singular, the smoking pot and the burning torch are one. The smoking pot and the burning torch, it passed between the pieces.

And we see the two sides of God's presence, his illumination, his light, his beneficial blessing and provision and at the same time the smoking pot or furnace of judgment. And you can't have one without the other. And there is the necessity for God to purge and to cleanse, to go to the very center of things with his presence, to sanctify.

And in the course of our lives, we are purified and refined like gold. You're familiar with the passages in the New Testament where the action of God in our souls is compared to the refining process of a metal worker who takes the gold or the silver and heats it. And as he heats it, the impurities rise to the top and he scoops them away.

So in that refining process, which requires heat, requires fire, the impurities are extracted and taken away. And there is in the process of bringing the promises to Abram, to fulfillment, there is the necessity of purification. And so after the statement of the promise, we now see in chapter 15 that there is going to be a refining process.

The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. The Israelites are going to experience something in bondage that will enable them or should enable them to appreciate the fulfillment of the covenant promise in a way they could not had they never been slaves, had they never been out of the land. And there is a sense in which we recognize that our love for God is conditioned by the grace that we've experienced in deliverance.

Jesus talked about the woman, the former prostitute who washed his feet with her hair and he talks to a Pharisee who's been religious all his life and he's eating the meal in the household. And he says, the one who has been forgiven little, loves little. The one who has been forgiven much, loves much.

And this woman with her expression of love and concern for the Lord Jesus Christ, with that simple act of washing his feet, transcends and outweighs and is at the opposite end of the scale of the sumptuous meal that was prepared by the Pharisee because he didn't have in his heart the appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ that she did. God can turn cursing to blessing. God can take negative things and work them together for good.

The slavery and bondage in Egypt is something that God will work together for good. It may seem like cold comfort when you're in the second of the four generations and you're stomping the straw into the mud to make bricks to say, well, this is all working together into God's grand design. But this is the perspective that is required.

It's necessary for us to understand where we are in God's plan and that God sees and God knows. So having seen this confirmation of the covenant promise and that there is going to be some intervening space and time between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise, we're reminded of things we've seen elsewhere in the Bible. God has promised the Lord Jesus Christ the kingdom.

He has put all things under his feet. Through his victory on the cross, he is the highest in God's plan. Angels, principalities, powers, humankind are all subject to him, but not yet.

Jesus Christ won that victory on the cross 2,000 years ago, but he has not yet claimed the fruits of that victory in their fullness, has he? He is seated at the right hand of the Father until God makes his enemies his footstool. There's a sense in which the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, even when it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ. So what do we do with the intervening time when we say, well, God has saved me, he's promised me ultimate sanctification, eternal life with him in glory, freedom from tears and death and pain and all of the things that plague us in this life, but I don't have it yet.

When I accepted Christ as my Savior, he didn't just translate me to the realms of glory and the eternal future in the kingdom of the Father. I find myself still here with frailties and failures and all sorts of things to contend with, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Why? God has a purpose for this.

God has a purpose for the horror and darkness that falls on Abram. God has a purpose for the 400 years of bondage that his descendants are going to experience. God had a purpose in the delay between anointing David as king over Israel and placing him on the throne.

His years as a fugitive living in the caves and hills in fear of his life does something in

God's plan, does something in David's life that is necessary. This interval that you and I live in, however long or short it may be, has a purpose in God's plan and with whatever darkness, whatever suffering, whatever challenge, as well as whatever blessing and provision and expressions of God's grace, whatever our life holds, it's important for us to remember at all times that God sees and God hears and God is working these things together for good to those who love him, to those who remember that they are called according to God's purpose. If we faint, if we lose sight of the purpose and the goal, we will fail.

That's what we're going to see in Genesis chapter 16 this morning. Abram has just had a great victory, both literally and spiritually. He had a great victory over the kings.

He had the perspective to turn down the loot and the booty that the king of Sodom wanted to give him, wanted to give him a reward belonging to the world and Abram said, I don't even want a shoestring from you. God comes personally to Abram for the first time recorded in scripture and speaks to him in person and says, Abram, I am your shield. I am your exceeding great reward.

What an honor for Abram for God to say, I am going to take the place of all of this that you rightfully turned down. And then God manifests himself after this day of waiting with the dead meat and the carrion birds, the horror and the darkness. God says there's going to be times of trouble for your descendants, but afterward comes the great victory.

Afterward comes the great reward. So we think this is the most profound maturity and growth and orientation to God's plan that we've seen in Abram's life thus far. He's at a high point, but as we have often observed in scripture, those high points often precede a failure.

And just when we think we've got everything wired together and are finally on the right track, something will slip under our guard. So God confirms and in the last part of chapter 15, when the Lord in verse 18 made the covenant, confirmed the covenant with Abram saying to your descendants, I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. And then he gives the most complete list of inhabitants that you'll find anywhere in the Old Testament.

There are ten peoples listed here. Usually you have five or six. But here you have all of the ites, the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.

All of these people will be dispossessed so that Abram's descendants can possess. It is going to be taken from these people, these Amorites as the general term, and given to the people of the covenant, the people of promise. So everything's looking great.

But now in chapter 16, what happens? Let's read this first. We have two episodes here in

chapter 16. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

And she had an Egyptian maid servant whose name was Hagar. 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. 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.

So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. 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. 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. Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.

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. The angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand. Then the angel of the Lord said to her, I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.

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. 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. 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? Therefore the well was called Bir Lahai Roi.

Observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram named his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

The very first phrase in this section, and this is one of the places where the people who split the book up into chapters and verses really did it right. This is a fresh section, it's marked that way by the subtle markers that you find in Hebrew, and we're going to see that this chapter is composed of two scenes, two contrasting scenes. We might label these two scenes.

The first one in verses two through six, this is Sarah's encounter with subjectivity, Sarah's encounter with loss of faith. The second half of the chapter, verses seven through fourteen, actually seven through sixteen, is Hagar's encounter with God. You have two women who are contrasted, both of them have an encounter, and there are results from each.

So these two scenes in this chapter stand in contrast to one another, and the irony is that, especially from our perspective, we remember that Paul talks about Hagar and Sarah over in Galatians, doesn't he? When he talks about the son of the slave woman and the son of the free woman, he says the son of the bondwoman will not inherit with the son of the free woman, and we always think of Hagar and Ishmael, and we associate them with the unfortunate and negative sides of failure, and that the Ishmaelites will be a thorn in Israel's side down through the generations. We always think of them as sort of a negative light. That's not the way God's plan was supposed to work.

Abram wasn't supposed to be having children with Hagar, and there wasn't supposed to be an Ishmael. It's supposed to be Sarah and Isaac, and this other is the result of an aberration. But in this chapter and in the book of Genesis, we have a different perspective, we have a different application and view, because here, Hagar is on the positive side of things, and Sarah is on the negative side, and we find it right here in the very first verse.

Because right after this tremendous scene where the theophany, the presence of God, comes down and passes between the pieces, this high point in Abram's life, then you have Sarai, Abram's wife, had born him no children. This was the first thing we found out about Sarah way back when we first began the story of Abram. When they left Ur of the Chaldees, and when they left Haran to come to the land of promise, and it lists who's with Abram, it says Abram left with his wife Sarah, and Sarah was barren and had no children.

So we know this about her, and here, however many years later, at least ten years later, because they've been in the land ten years, she's still barren. God has made these promises, He's confirmed them to Abram, He has appeared in person and confirmed them, He has detailed exactly how they're going to be fulfilled, but in Sarai's mind, ten years have passed and nothing has changed. The promise has been given, but there's no fulfillment.

Where's the product? Where's the end result of all of this speaking by God? God has made a lot of noise about this promise, but she looks around and she still doesn't have a child. So, you can just picture, out there in the plains of the land, out near Hebron, nice morning, she's sitting there outside the tent flap, probably a little dew on the grass and so forth, and she's thinking, you know, we've been here ten years, and Abram keeps saying that God has said all these things, but I don't see any fulfillment, I don't see any

result, and look how old I've gotten. I've lived my life here, I'm in my seventies or eighties here, however old she is, no children.

Something has got to be done, something's got to move, something's got to shake. I'm sick of this waiting, and this works on her mind, and so she's sitting there, you can just see her out there, little mound of camel hides or something she's using for a couch, she's sitting there just thinking, and thinking, and thinking, and it just reminds me, Jerry Reed put out a song a long time ago about smoking, it's called Another Puff, and he said, you know, there's a lot of talk going around these days about how cigarette smoking whittles your life away. He said, I've seen it, heard it so many times, and finally it just started to prey on my mind.

Well, this is just preying on her mind, it just keeps returning to it, and so she begins to think, well, what are the options, what are the choices here? Going to the Lord and crying out doesn't appear to be an option that she considers. Unlike Hannah, unlike Jacob's wife Rachel, and others that you can point to in Scripture who were concerned about not being able to bear children, those ladies went to the Lord and cried out to the Lord. Sarai recognizes that God is in control of these things, doesn't she? What does she say in verse 2 when she's talking to her husband? The Lord has restrained me from bearing, from giving birth.

Well, why doesn't she go to the Lord and have a talk with Him? She doesn't. Instead, as she's turning it over in her mind, she's thinking, what are my options? She had an Egyptian maid servant whose name was Hagar. Well, how did this maid show up? We haven't seen any previous reference to her.

Abram is from Ur, he goes up to Haran, he comes down to the land, but then when there was the big famine, they went down to Egypt. Remember? If you go back a couple of chapters to chapter 12, this is when Abram gets scared and he says, Sarai is my sister. And in verse 16 of chapter 12, the pharaoh takes Sarai into his household and he treats Abram well for her sake.

He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants. And this is apparently where Hagar enters the Abram household during this sojourn in Egypt. So, because of Sarai, there are the plagues and they are ejected from Egypt.

And pharaoh commanded him in verse 20, commanded the men concerning him. They sent him away with his wife and all that he has. So, he keeps all of the oxen, the men and maid servants and everything that he acquired in Egypt.

And it seems fair to conclude that this is where Hagar enters the picture. So, she's been in the household now for a number of years. And as Sarai casts her mind about for a solution to her dilemma, her eye falls on her young maid servant, Hagar.

So, Sarai says to Abram, looky here Abram, the Lord has restrained me from bearing. You almost get the idea that she looks at the Lord and Abram as in collusion with one another to thwart her, to make her life miserable. You almost get the idea that she wants to say, well Abram, your God, your Lord has restrained me from bearing.

She doesn't appeal to the Lord. She doesn't ask Abram to intercede with the Lord on her behalf. She says, this Lord that you keep saying has promised us all these descendants, he's restrained my womb from bearing.

We've got to do something about this. So, her conclusion is to follow a very commonplace and acceptable way of practice at this time in ancient history. You can find this practice documented in the Code of Hammurabi, in the tablets and records that they have unearthed at Nuzi and other ancient sites going back anywhere from 2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. There are half a dozen different documented texts where they talk about the fact that if a wife cannot conceive children or does not conceive children, she can take one of her maids, one of her female slaves and have that slave conceive as a surrogate.

You find this practice, we'll even see it in the future here in the Old Testament where someone will bear on the knees of, the maid will bear on the knees of the wife who is unable to conceive. So, it's a common practice. And Sarai says, well, here's the solution just as people do today through technology and so forth.

If there's a problem with conception, then we look around to see, well, how can we bring this about and even have surrogate motherhood where they implant the fertilized egg into another person. I think the most bizarre of these is where a woman who is having trouble has an egg extracted and fertilized and then her mother, the grandmother of the child, actually carries the child and gives birth. I saw on television several months back where a lady in her late fifties had done this for her daughter and was giving birth through injections of hormones and so forth.

I'm not quite sure what kind of card that person is going to pick out on Mother's Day. It just seems kind of confusing to me. But where there's a real strong desire for this, people will cast about to find a solution.

Please go into my maid. And of course, there's a standard Hebrew word that means to go and it's *bo*. And this is a euphemism to go into.

Obviously, it's used here, it's a word for traveling to go into the house, to come out of the house and so forth. But it's sort of a double entendre in Hebrew and it means to have intercourse with. And so Sarai, most wives want to go the opposite direction from this.

The last thing they want is for their husband to have relations with another woman. But here, because there is an end in view, all Sarai can think about is I've got to find a way to have a child, to have offspring. And so she focuses on that and she figures out a way.

Here is a practice that I've seen other people do. Maybe she had a girlfriend back in Ur or in Heron or somewhere that did this and solved the problem in this way. And so she focuses on the goal.

The goal is to have a child and she figures out a means to that end. Do we ever do this? Do we ever see that there's a problem? What this reminds me of as much as anything, it reminds me of several things, but one of the things it reminds me of is playing chess. My brother is a ranked chess player.

He's very good. And if you've ever played chess, you know that you've got the pieces and they make different kinds of moves. And as you, each person takes their turn and you get the board arranged and the knights and the bishops and so forth come out, the pawns move forward.

Pretty soon, it's inevitable, there's going to be the opportunity to capture a piece and you want to try to capture and take away your opponent's stronger pieces. So his castle or his queen or something may come out there and become vulnerable to attack and you say, I've got this piece here and I can go and it looks so great. You think, wouldn't it be great if I could get rid of this powerful piece over here? And at least in my mind, when I'm looking, I think, well, I'm not quite sure how this is all going to turn out because if I take this piece and he takes mine and I take his, he takes mine and it gets lost in how far forward you can see.

But it's so attractive sometimes, especially when you're a very poor chess player, to just look at the results of that move. You think, this is going to be so great to move my pawn up here and make his queen go away. That just is so attractive and you just want to push away.

Well, you know, there could be other moves that can be extremely devastating. Maybe this is a ploy and when I capture his queen, he's going to run his rook down and checkmate my king. But we don't want to think about that.

It's just, there's such a great pleasure in moving a piece, you see people just stomp the piece down and take away that powerful piece on the board and then the other person moves and it's checkmate. Well, we tend to look at the short term. We look at the immediate objective and we don't want to think about the consequences.

That doesn't enter into our calculations and when it does, we kind of push it away. This is what happens to Sarah. She doesn't think about any of the other consequences that may ensue if she sends her maid out there to be a surrogate mother.

She just says, then I'll have a child. The problem is, I don't have a child. If I have a child, my problem will go away.

How I get the child, what other consequences, I'll be like Scarlett O'Hara. I'll think about

that tomorrow. Right now, I just want this to take place.

That's exactly what she does. If you can imagine a wife going to her husband and saying, please go have sexual relations with another woman and get her pregnant. It's bizarre even on the surface of it, but that's exactly what she does.

In Abram, he did the voice of Sarah. This probably wasn't a real tough sell for Abram. You don't get the idea that in his nobility, he says, oh no, and she has to wheedle and cajole and pressure.

He seems to take this on the first try. Do you notice anything? Are there any bells that ring in your mind when you look at verse 2 and verse 3? Because when Abram heeded the voice of Sarah, then Sarah, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. There's a sequence of nouns and verbs here, and it's quite striking in Hebrew.

Let me direct your attention back to Genesis chapter 3 and verse 6. Genesis chapter 3 and verse 6. We have an exceedingly similar situation, and the inspired record here wants us to see this link. It's quite striking in Hebrew. Genesis 3, 6, so when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Same word for take, same word for give, similar situation where it's all the wife's fault that the husband gets in trouble, so to speak. But like chapter 3, there are unforeseen consequences that ensue, consequences that should have been seen but are not.

And when Abram, you can also go down, look in verse 17 of chapter 3 while you're there. God speaks to Adam after he pries him out of his hiding place. To Adam he said, because you have heeded the voice of your wife.

Same phrase, because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying you shall not eat of it. Now this may be common practice in the ancient Near East for surrogate motherhood and so forth, but Abram knows better. God knows that Abram knows better.

Abram knows that he knows better, but it just seems to be a convenient confluence of, I mean, how many times is a man's wife going to say, hey, go mess around. So he heeds the voice of his wife. And so we, as the girls are fond of saying, he should hear the warning music at this point in the movie.

So he heeds the voice of his wife, Sarai, and we have this sort of repeated. We could have left out perhaps verse 3 and not lost anything in the story, except that the wife of Sarai the narrative here wants us to make that link. She 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.

Now we know by going forward a little bit in the story, you remember at the end of the chapter it says that Abram was 86 when Hagar gives birth to Ishmael. So, if you figure nine months, roughly a year previous to this, Abram is 85. He's been ten years in the land, so he was 75 when he came to dwell in the land.

And that ties back to what we had as a chronological reference earlier when the, when Abram departs and goes to the land. It tells us back in chapter 12, I believe, that Abram was 75, 12-4. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran and comes into the land.

So ten years have elapsed. So now, what takes place? He went into Hagar in verse 4, and she conceived. This tells us that there's nothing wrong with Abram's ability to reproduce.

It is Sarai whose womb is closed. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. This is something to which we will return a little bit later.

Then Sarai said to Abram, my wrong be upon you. My oppression, my suffering 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. If you think about Sarai here, and she is the primary actor. Hagar is more or less passive here.

It's Sarai who has the idea. It's Sarai who initiates this, and when it goes wrong, remember Genesis chapter 3 and Genesis chapter 4? What is the natural human response in sin when you initiate something and it goes wrong? You want to look around for somebody to blame. So Sarai, when she sees this thing go sour, says, it's your fault, Abram.

I gave my maid to you, and I had all the best of intentions how this would solve a problem for us, and now look what has happened. My wrong and my suffering be on your head. It's your fault.

I don't know how it seems to you, but it seems very irrational to me that she initiated this, she went to Abram, she brought it all about it, and now that it's gone sour, she says, Abram, it's all your fault. She doesn't say you shouldn't have listened to me. Why did you listen to me? Why did you let me talk you into this? But that's more or less the gist of what she's saying.

And again, indirectly, she blames the Lord. She says, the Lord has stopped up my womb in the previous case. Now she says, the Lord judged between you and me.

Why has God let this happen to me? The Lord ought to be coming down on your head. It's your fault. She doesn't go to the Lord and say, Lord, I am despised in my maidservant's eyes.

Oh Lord, why am I still barren? Oh Lord, I goofed. She goes to Abram. And this is the classic expression of subjectivity that we have talked about so many times.

What is subjectivity? It's when we're not living an objective life. Objective truth is the truth that God reveals. Objectivity is keeping our eyes on God, on his plan, and on his word.

Subjectivity is what we look at when we take our eyes off of that. And there are three broad categories where our eyes will always come to rest. It's either ourselves, other people, or circumstances.

How many of those do we find in Sarai's view at this point? Well, she looks at the circumstance of having no children and it's preying on her mind. She looks at other people and sees that now that Hagar has conceived, she's got sort of a smugness about her that wasn't there before. The way this is constructed in the Hebrew, it doesn't say that Hagar persecuted Sarai or said anything, but this is Sarai's perception.

Sarai says, I'm despised in her eyes. She doesn't say, you know, she's returning my laundry wet or she's, you know, giving me cold burnt breakfast. There apparently was no overt... This is largely in Sarai's mind.

And certainly Hagar is going to be proud that she, apparently on the first try, has turned up with child and everything's great as far as she's concerned. But Sarai detects smugness and she didn't anticipate the change. And this is something that happens to us a lot.

We don't anticipate, people don't anticipate when they are looking to solve a problem, they do something they shouldn't do. They don't think about the change in relationships that can take place, the change in perception, the change in respect, the change in stature when something like this takes place. People look at the satisfaction of the moment or the resolution of a problem at the moment and don't stop and think.

This has happened again with these surrogate births where they get a surrogate mother who's going to carry the child and bring it to term and she signs a contract and says, that's fine, you can have the baby as soon as it's born and so forth. In our adoption and maternity services down here, people who say, oh, I can't deal with this pregnancy, I'm not ready to raise a child, I want to put her up for adoption as soon as it's born, I don't even want to see it. Well, when the day comes and the baby is born, there's a whole fresh set of unforeseen feelings and emotions and there's a whole complex of relationship there between the mother and the child and the surrogate mother and the

child and the husband and the surrogate mother and all of these complications that didn't really surface when the plan was hatched.

And that creates all kinds of grief and that's what has happened here. So Sarai says the circumstances are bad, look at the way things have turned out with people, I am suffering here, eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, she never turns to the Lord, she never appeals to the Lord and you will notice in contrast with what we read in the last half of this chapter, God doesn't appear to Sarai either, does he? Why is that? Why doesn't God show up and talk to Sarai before this all gets out of hand? There is a reason, there is a reason for this. We're going to pause and take our break, when we come back we're going to explore that reason and we're going to see the contrast that the narrative itself brings out for us.

But this is a good place to take a break.