

How is God Faithful Even When We are Faithless?

- All right, we are continuing a study in an incredible book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, first book in your Bible. We're in Chapter 16. If you want to find your spot, that's where we're at. We're going right through it. We're skipping nothing. And today we're answering the question: How is God faithful even when we are faithless? And as a case study, we're getting to know a couple named Abraham and Sarah, one of the most significant couples in the Bible, and one of the most important couples in the history of the world. And today, you're gonna see one of their bad days. If your marriage or your family has had a bad day, this is their bad day. And what tends to happen is all of our families have got some deep dark secrets. Hey, man, I mean, don't shout it out, especially if your mom's here. But nonetheless, our families have all got some deep dark secrets. Stuff that's like, well, tell me about that. They're like, yeah, I don't really talk about that. Well, who are those relatives? Yeah, we don't really know them. Well, what happened? That's none of your business. And so you just know bits and pieces, but you never get the real story. One example, some years ago, I knew a guy, his dad was a leader in the church and his dad was on his deathbed. I think he was probably in a coma or on a ventilator. He was incapable of communicating. So this guy, with his brothers, went to the hospital to say goodbye to their father. They walk into the room and all he had was brothers. And there were a few women, young women over the bed of their father, weeping, very bitterly, quite emotional. He had no idea who they were. He'd never seen him before. He walked in, he's like, "So how do you know this man?" And the girl said, "Well, he's our dad." He's like, "Well, he's my dad." Apparently, the guy had, I don't know how this worked, He had, well, I mean, I know how it worked, but I'm not exactly sure how it worked, but you know, so... He had two women and two families, sons with one woman and daughters with another, and they'd ever met and didn't know the other existed. And the point is we spend so much of our life trying to keep our family secrets in the dark. Eventually, they come into the light, and what the Bible does is something very unique. It takes those dark family secrets and it brings them out into the light and it shows some of the most difficult, dark days of families. And it does so for two reasons. Number one, to warn us, and to say, if you're thinking of doing this, please don't. It's a really bad idea. And number two, for hope. If you have done this, God worked through their life to bring some hope to them. And that same God is available to you. Well, today we're gonna look at Abraham and his wife and his other wife. All right, here we go, all right. Faith-filled people have faithless days, and Abraham and Sarah in the Bible, they're always depicted as the prototype, precedent and pattern of faith. Genesis 16:1-6. "Now Sarah, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children." At this point, she's in her mid-70s. He's in his mid-80s. They really wanna start their family, and it seems like it's a little late. She's barren. And God told them, 10 years prior, you're gonna have a son. They've been waiting for 10 years. How many of you, 10 years is a long time? You're in your mid-70s. You're like, can I please start my family now? We're both in diapers. So "She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarah said to Abraham." So see, this is Sarah's plan. "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me." Little bitterness and blame toward the Lord. "from bearing children. Go in to my servant." Pastor Mark, that's a weird statement. Does that mean what I think it means? Yes, it does. "Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her." "And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah. So after Abraham had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan." They'd been waiting 10 years for the promise of the coming of this

son. "Sarah, Abraham's wife, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abraham, her husband as a wife." And he went into Hagar and she conceived. Does anyone see potential conflict coming on the horizon? True or false, two wives is too many? "And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress." So now Hagar is gonna displace Sarah. "Sarah said to Abraham. 'May the wrong done to me be on you.'" Somehow she's a victim. We'll talk about this. If you understand this, please explain it to me. "'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.' But Abraham said to Sarah, 'Behold, your servant is in your power to do to her as you please.' Then Sarah dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her." Here we go. This is how we know people didn't write the book. Nobody'd be like, I'm gonna tell everybody about my family. We'd never put that in the book. Only God wrote the Bible. This is why God includes the stories of our best and worst days. And here, the real underlying issue in crisis, is barrenness. And in their day, barrenness was a crisis because the thought was, you wanted to take what you inherited from previous generations, your business, your land, your wealth, you wanted to steward it well and then you wanted to give it to your children and grandchildren so that there could be generational blessing. And there could be the accumulation of wealth from one generation to the next. This is the complete opposite and antithesis of our world, where the bumper sticker says, we're spending our children's inheritance. This is the exact opposite. Had a completely different mindset. They saw children as a blessing, and they were worried about generations. The Bible says in Proverbs that a wise man leaves an inheritance for his children's children. And we're very foolish, so we don't give our children an inheritance, we give them a debt. So we think differently. And so for them, having children was paramount, it was preeminent, it was significant. For us, we don't understand this 'cause we are the opposite. We tend to think that children are a curse and not a blessing and so we do all we can to prevent having children. And so we have same-sex relationships. We use birth control, we use abortion. We don't wanna have kids. Many of us do not. In their day, they wanted to have kids, and kids were considered a blessing. So if you don't have children, you don't have a legacy for the future and everything that your family has been laboring for for generations comes to an end. And this could lead to a crisis in a family system where one of two things would happen. Number one, sometimes the husband would divorce the wife if she was barren and go get another wife so that he could have an heir. Or they would find a surrogate and the surrogate would provide the heir. This is how it happened in the culture, but it's not supposed to be for God's people. And so what Abraham and Sarah are gonna do, they're gonna take something that is acceptable within the culture, but not within the scripture. And the big idea is this. The Bible says that God's people are to be holy. What that means is set apart or different. We do sex, gender, marriage, family, children, different. And here, they're adopting a worldly way of doing things, which is not a godly way of doing things. So let's talk about each of these characters, Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham, in succession. So Sarah. God told Abraham and Sarah previously, in Genesis 15:4, that a son was coming. That through that son would come a nation, the Nation of Israel. Through the Nation of Israel would come a blessing to the nations of the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's a lot riding on the coming of this son. Now God didn't tell them that the son would come just through Abraham, but Abraham and his wife, Sarah. And it's now been 10 years. And though they are people of faith, they are wavering in faith. They're in

this moment, faithless and trusting God's promise as we all are at certain times and seasons. And the point is this, we don't have perfect faith, but we have a God who is perfectly faithful, and their faith is imperfect here. And so she is struggling with God's promise. She's waited 10 years. How many of you, 10 years is a long time, right? We yell at the microwave. We have a horn ministry, 'cause we're impatient people. We just are. 10 years is a long time. So rather than just judge her, let's say that we're a lot like her. So then what happens is she sees herself as barren and this is the identity that she has taken. You need to be very careful that the identity that you assume is not achieved by you, but received from God. God made her, God knows her, God loves her, God saved her. God has a relationship with her. God has a plan for her. That should be her identity. Instead, her identity is I'm barren. And her thought is I need to do something to change my identity. If God hasn't given me yet the child, then I will have Hagar, my maid servant, marry my husband, conceive a child, and then she thinks that she will take the child. How many of you women know that once a woman has a baby, she prefers to keep it, as a general rule. How many of you, if your boss came in and said, yeah, I was thinking about it, I need your baby. No, I'm not even gonna pray about it. No, the answer is no. And the question is, if Hagar has a child, does that cure Sarah's problem of barrenness? No, it doesn't. And it doesn't resolve her identity crisis. Again, your identity is one of two things. It's received from God or it's achieved by you. And she sees herself as barren. She should see herself as blessed. And she only speaks two verses here. But Sarah is speaking in a way that is very selfish. Two times she says me, and five times she says, or excuse me, two times she says I, and five times she says me. I, I, me, me, me, me, me. She's not thinking about Hagar and what's best for her. And she's certainly not thinking about the child that would be borne through Hagar, with her husband, and ultimately, she's being very selfish. She's thinking I have my needs and you all need to do what's best for me. And that's ultimately where much of our sin and our poor planning comes in. We become selfish. We think about ourselves and we lose sight of others. And so what happens is, they've got Hagar, she's Egyptian. Previously in the story, they had sought to take refuge down in Egypt, and God delivered them. He said you're not supposed to be here. I need to get you outta here. When they left, they apparently took some people with them. If they weren't supposed to go to Egypt, they probably shouldn't have taken Egyptians with them. The point is this, if you go to the place you're not supposed to be, you're probably gonna enter into relationships you're not supposed to have. And ultimately, they take this woman with her. And here, what we see is that Sarah is sort of bitter against the Lord, but she's not praying to the Lord. Now she may have prayed, but there is no indication that Sarah ever stopped and prayed to the Lord. God, what's your plan? What are you doing? Is there anything I need to know? Is there anything I need to do? Is there anything I need to change? What is your will? It says that Abraham builds an altar. It says that Abraham called on the name of the Lord. It says that Abraham believed the Lord. Now Sarah was a believer, but she was a bitter believer. She wasn't a praying believer. She wasn't inquiring of the Lord, she was accusing toward the Lord. And she sees herself as a victim of the Lord's failure. And sometimes, let me say this, when you and I are hurting, we can be very selfish. I, I, me, me, me, me, me, and also we can blame it on the Lord and get bitter against him. Well, you failed me, you didn't do your job. You didn't come through. I mean, you could have done it at any point, what you said you would do or could do, and you didn't do. Therefore, I am fully vindicated to rebel against you to make my

own plan because you've not executed on your plan, and she takes matters into her own hands. And let me say this, we can judge Sarah or we can identify with her. We can stand back religiously and say, I can't believe she did that. We can approach repently, and say, I've done that, too. How many of you have grown a little impatient, felt a little entitled, got a little selfish and sort of blamed God for your hard life? See, we call this being an American. And so we've all done this, and this is where she finds herself, and she blames the Lord. She says the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. So what happens here is she comes up with a plan for Abraham to ultimately take a second wife. Is this a good idea or a bad idea? Let me ask the women. I'm afraid to ask the men. Let me ask the women, 'cause I know we'll get a clearer answer. Ladies, is it a bad idea for one man to have more than one wife?

- [Women] Yes.

- Yes, it's a bad idea. And if you're a man, you're like, I don't know, it's in the Bible. I believe in the Bible. You need to do more homework, sir. And don't tell your wife. 'Cause wives don't like this story. Grace hates this story. If I don't preach this right, I gotta sleep with one eye open tonight. I mean, she hates this story. She's like you better not get another girl. I'm like, I'm not even thinking about it. No, I promise. I won't. I've been defensive all week, so pray for me. It's been a little rough at our house. So what happens here is God has a plan, and Sarah has a plan, and rather than waiting for God's plan, she gets ahead of God's plan, and she makes her own plan. Does her plan succeed?

- [Congregation] No.

- It succeeds and it fails because it's not God's plan. Here's the big idea. Sometimes we're like, okay, God, yeah, I've got a plan. And my plan is working, 'cause I'm working my plan. The point is this, God doesn't bless your plan, he only blesses his plan. And sometimes you think I got this. God's like, no, you don't. You need me. And if you don't follow my plan, you will succeed, but it'll be a cursing, not a blessing. See, we tend to think in terms of success and failure, we need to rearchitect our understanding toward blessing and cursing. That's the theme of Genesis. It appears more than 80 times. A lot of times people are like, oh, I made a plan and I executed it and I succeeded. I don't want to be successful, I wanna be blessed. And I could be successful executing my plan, but I can only be blessed if I'm executing his plan. See, ultimately you gotta stop, and you gotta say, okay, God, what is your plan? What do you say? What do you want? Not only what is your will, when is your timing? And what she's struggling with here is not God's will, she wants to have a kid, it's God's timing. It's been 10 years. And so ultimately, what she does here, she sees herself as a victim. And then all of a sudden, she seems shocked that when Hagar marries her husband and gets pregnant, that there's tension in the home. Let me say, you don't need a gift of discernment to see this coming. You're like, well, God, I'm gonna have a younger woman marry my husband and have his baby. Oh my gosh, we have conflict. Of course you do. So let's talk about Hagar. She is, let's say that she is possibly an opportunist. We're in Scottsdale, Arizona. So have you ever, here we go. Have you ever... Have you ever seen a rich kind of not super healthy, a little bit naughty old man connect with a younger woman

who sees an opportunity if she can marry him and have a baby, knowing that he will die earlier, and her and the kid will hit the jackpot. Have you ever seen that, hypothetically, in Scottsdale, Arizona? Yeah, you should see what I see right now. There's old men, like I'm not, I'm not... They're not blinking. And their wife is on the phone pretending like this isn't happening. It's amazing from where I stand. So let's say that Hagar is possibly an opportunist. She's like, I could displace Sarah. I could have the kid, we could inherit this great affluence. This is a jackpot for me and my future. And so the question then is, God had made a promise, that the first born son would have God's favor and blessing rest upon him, that he would be blessed to be a blessing to the nations of the earth, and that he himself would become a great nation. Well, now she's pregnant, and the question is, do all of those promises go to her son? Yes or no?

- [Woman] No.

- No, because the promise was made through Abraham and his wife, Sarah. But she's thinking that she can redirect all of God's promises and blessing. And ultimately, this is gonna lead to a conflict that 4,000 years later we are still having. And what happens is she then has contempt for Sarah. Oh, I got a little morning sickness 'cause I'm pregnant. Oh, I wonder if it's a boy or a girl. Abraham, I wonder if he's gonna look like you. I mean, I know he won't look like Sarah. Shots fired. I mean, this is... And what happens is she has contempt towards Sarah and she raises her son to have contempt towards Sarah's son. So this conflict will continue later in the story. And this is a generational problem. And so what ultimately happens here, some of you have asked, what is this like? A blended family can be a beautiful family, right? But not if you're still all living together, both your first and second wife. So some of you with a blended family just emotionally visit this haunted house of, okay, yeah, well, we were married. I got a divorce, we have some kids, I got remarried, but we still all live together. My ex and my current and my first kids and her kids and our new kids. True or false? This is a Scooby Do episode every day, ruh-roh. This is a bad situation. This is poor family architecting and planning. And oftentimes what happens is we make bad plans. We bring to children into those homes and then they pay a steep price for our foolish design. And that's what's gonna happen here. So we finally arrive at the point where we're gonna talk about Abraham. All right. He is the man of faith. He appears 300 times in the Bible. He is prominent from Genesis 11 to 25. Is he having a good day or a bad day?

- [Women] Bad day.

- I noticed the women said it. Again, the men are like, I don't know, I'm still thinking about the two girls thing. Stop. You got a naughty mind. So what happens is he... And it's so weird because who comes up with a plan for him to marry and impregnate another woman?

- [Women] Sarah.

- Sarah. It was like, well, you know, I mean, it was her idea, and you know, I mean, honey, I mean, if it's for the family, I mean, you know. I'm here to serve. You know what I mean, he's very

passive with all of this. Grace is still shocked it was Sarah's plan. How many of you, if you're like, Abraham got a second wife, you'd be like that dirty old man. Like, well, the wife came up with the idea. Huh? Terrible idea. And what is interesting is there are occasions where Abraham is active and then there's occasions that he's passive. He's very unpredictable. How many of you are married to a man like that? Don't raise your hand, but you know. And so what happened earlier, God told him, here's your real estate. And then ultimately, he and his relative, Lot, were so blessed and overflowing with bounty that they had to divide the land. And what happens is Abraham goes to Lot, and what he says is, well, there's two plots. You pick which one you want. Well, he shouldn't have done that. That was passive, 'cause God already told him which piece of land to get. As well, he was headed into Egypt previously, and as they approached the border, he looked at his wife, Sarah, and he said, you're very beautiful. They're gonna want you, so they're gonna hurt me. So here's the plan. Lie, say you're my sister, and then the Pharaoh will marry you and you can join the demonic cult leader's harem and I'll be okay. Thanks, babe. And he was passive 'cause he didn't want conflict. But then his crazy nephew, Lot, gets taken in war. Abraham saddled up 318 mercenaries to ride over 100 miles with him. He then assembled the kings of five kingdoms. He became the commander-in chief of this allied forces and this tremendous army. And he laid siege to the four kingdoms that had overtaken Lot and his family. It says in Hebrews that he slaughtered them and delivered Lot. Is he active or passive? He's super active. So there are times that he's passive, and there's times that he's active. Here with his wife, Sarah, he's very-

- [Congregation] Passive.

- Passive. He's like, well, honey, I'll just do what you say. And afterwards he is like, I don't like how this is working out. He's like, well, then you just.. You decide what we're all gonna do. And Grace pointed this out and she said, it seems like he's passive with his wife and he's active with everyone and everything else. And a lot of guys are that way. You're active at work, you're passive at home. You're active toward your career. You're passive with your wife and kids. You're active toward your income. You're passive toward your God. And so Abraham is a man of faith, but he doesn't have perfect faith. His faith is sort of up and down. It is ebbing and flowing. And what we see here is another fall. And so we saw, earlier in Genesis, the first couple was Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve fell. And here it is Abraham and Sarah, replacing Adam and Eve with a fall. And what happened in the garden was there was a permitted tree, and then there was a forbidden fruit, and the woman took the forbidden fruit and gave it to the man, and he partook. And here, Abraham is in the position of Adam and Sarah's in the place of Eve. And instead of the forbidden fruit, we have the forbidden female. And Sarah takes the forbidden female and then brings it to her husband and he partakes and now we have a second fall. And so what we have here, as well, is the beginning among God's people of what we would polygamy. Polygamy was not God's original intention and design. God's original intention and design thus far in the storyline of Genesis. God made them male and female. I know we're crazy, binary gender. It's like I feel like a girl. I feel like a cookie. I feel like a puppy. You're not. Okay, so anyways. You know, there's male and female. God made us male and female. And they brought a man and a woman together for marriage. Marriage is two things, it's covenants

and consummation. And it's between one man and one woman. That was God's divine design for marriage. So people were like, well, how do you know God wasn't for polygamy? There was one man and one woman. You didn't even have a choice. You're like, how do I know she's the one? That's it. You know, like . So ultimately, that was it. God made it very simple. This was the perfect design. Then what happens is in Genesis 4, a godless man named Lamech, he's the first in human history to take more than one wife. And we know he's a bad guy 'cause his name is Lamech. Literally, his name means lame. So he has this lame idea for polygamy. And then what happens is God floods the earth in the days of Noah, summarizing where we've been in Genesis. Only eight people entered the ark and were spared the judgment of the flood, Noah and his three sons and their wives. None of them were polygamous. Four men, four wives. All those who were practicing polygamy died in the flood. There was no possibility of polygamy. And here polygamy is brought into the believing line with God's family. It didn't originate there. It was not God's intended design or plan. And what we see here then is there's going to be this legacy of certain people who are believers in the Bible that practice polygamy. But it never ends well. Right? And so ultimately, here's what I'm telling you we're gonna see in our lifetime. We're going to see polygamy legalized in our lifetime. There's two forms. Polygamy is where one man takes multiple wives. That's what Abraham is doing. It's a terrible, horrible, painful, brutal idea. The other is polyandry where one woman takes multiple husbands. I mean, as a dude... Rarely am I speechless, rarely. You're a married guy. Imagine your wife having multiple husbands and you all gotta figure how to live together.

- [Woman] Wow.

- Okay. Yeah. So I would put turnbuckles in the living room and last man alive is the husband. That's how it would go down if it was in my house. I couldn't imagine that. But what we now have in our culture, we have eradicated male and female, and we've eradicated marriage between a man and a woman. And we have no reason to think that there will be any restrictions on sex and marriage. And somebody in our staff meeting asked this week, they're like, well, why do you think that we've rearchitected sexuality first instead of marriage? Here's why, we don't care that much about marriage, and so it's not our priority. So we've obliterated all of the categories of gender and sexuality. Inevitably, that'll lead to a rearchitecting of marriage. If it's not a man and a woman, why does it need to be two people and not three or four or five or six or whatever the number may be. So in our lifetime, you will see polygamy legalized, and you will see Christians, just put this in the video and mark it for the future, you will see people who are saying that they are Christians going to the Bible, making arguments, well, God's people did it. Yeah, and it was a bad... God's people did all kinds of stupid things. We just saw one guy get drunk and pass out naked in a tent. That doesn't mean you need to go camping. It's a bunch of examples on what were bad ideas so that we don't do them. Oh, well, they did it, I'll do it, too. That's not the idea. Here we have a crisis looming, that 4,000 years later, we still are paying the price for. So here's the good news. Gout is faithful even when we're faithless. At this point, you're like, Sarah's not helping. Hagar's not helping. Abraham is not helping. Genesis 16: 7-16, "The angel of the Lord." Somebody else shows up, appears in the story. "The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said,

'Hagar, servant of Sarah.'" He knows her by name. "'Where have you come from, where are you going?' She said, 'I'm fleeing from my mistress Sarah.' The angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit to her.' The angel of the Lord also said to her, 'I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.' I'm gonna bless you. "The angel of the Lord," and just notice that, too. I will multiply. So this person has some divine authority, "And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.'" Here's what I need you to know. Life begins in the womb, friends. Life begins in the womb. You are pregnant with the son. He's got a name, his name Ishmael. He's not just tissue. He's a human being made in the image and likeness of God with a destiny for blessing, a future before him and a name set upon him. His name is Ishmael.

- [Man] Amen.

- Jesus Christ came as a child in his mother's womb. John the Baptizer worshiped God, leapt for joy from his mother's womb. We are fearfully and wonderfully made from our mother's womb. "'You shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has listened to your affliction.'" Ishmael means the Lord hears me. "'He shall be a wild donkey of a man.'" How many of you mothers are like, please don't say that. I gotta raise him. Just so you know, a little research, I went to YouTube and I looked up wild donkeys. Wow. There are rednecks all over the globe. They're in Saudi Arabia, they're in Kentucky and they're all trying to ride wild donkeys, and it always ends poorly. The donkey kicks the whatever that local redneck is and they go flying. It's awesome. "'His hand is against everyone and everyone's hand against him.'" He's gonna do conflict and war and battle. "'And he shall dwell over his kinsmen.'" So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her." Literally, it's El Roi. "'You are a God of seeing.'" Means the God who sees me. "For she said, 'Truly I've seen him who looks after me.' Therefore, the well was called Beer-lahai-roi." It lies between these known places, Kadesh and Bered. "And Hagar bore Abraham a son and Abraham called the name of his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael. Abraham was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham." So ultimately, for Abraham, this is a big day. His name literally means father of a multitude. He's 86 years old and he finally becomes a father. What that means is, the first 85 years of his life, every time he heard his name, he felt pain. Your name means father. You're childless. Now he has a child. Not just a child, a son. Let me say this. Any man who has any modicum of health in his soul, when a woman becomes pregnant, births a child and is holding that child. Let's say it's a son. Could be a daughter or a son, but in this occasion, it's a son, that becomes the gravitational center of your emotional universe. Like, oh my gosh, there's my kid and their mom, which means now Abraham is going to be the drawn toward Hagar and Ishmael. He's wanted to be a dad his whole life. And there's his boy. So what happens with Hagar, she is commented upon later in Proverbs 30: 21-23. It says, "Under three things, the earth trembles, and one of them is a maid servant who displaces her mistress." What Proverbs is saying is when we architect the world, one of the foundational bedrock pieces for marriage and family is that the husband loves his wife. And if someone displaces the wife, then everything collapses and crumbles. And what is happening here is simply that. The mistress is displacing the wife, that ultimately, Hagar is supplanting Sarah. What's interesting about Hagar, Abraham and Sarah never refer to her by name. Sometimes

you learn in the Bible by what it says, and sometimes by what it doesn't say. They only refer to her as maid servant. They don't give her a name. They don't give her a lot of dignity or respect, and they don't speak of her personally. God does. God calls to her by name, Hagar, and your son's gonna be Ishmael. But Abraham and Sarah don't have that same honor for her. She could have left freely because here we see that when she found out she was pregnant and Sarah and her were having conflict, that she had contempt towards Sarah and Sarah was cruel toward her, she ultimately left freely. So she's not purely a victim in this story. She didn't have to marry Abraham and she didn't have to be there. She was free to go. What is interesting, though, to some degree, there is an intimation, or an echo of the story of Jesus' own mother, Mary. She was young. She was poor. She was alone. She was scared. She was pregnant. And a divine visitor showed up and told her, there is a plan for your son and there is a name for your son. Now she is not Mary, but she has some similarity to the story of Mary. And what she does, she names God, El Roi. What's really curious here, in the Bible, every single time God names a person, with one exception, and that is here, where Hagar names God El Roi, the God who sees me. She's the only person in the Bible that gives a name to God. She doesn't know this God. She doesn't love this God, but this God shows up. So she names this God. And here's the big idea. God blesses Hagar, but Hagar is not saved by God. There's a big difference between being saved and being blessed. God blesses people who aren't saved. It doesn't say that she believed the Lord. It says that of Abraham. It doesn't say that she called on the name of the Lord. It says that previously of Abraham. It doesn't say that she built an altar to worship the Lord. It says that of Abraham previously. There's no indication that she ever had faith in God, she was saved by God, that she had covenant with God, but instead, God is going to bless her. And some of you are here, and let me tell you this, God knows you. God knows you by name. God loves you. God has been active and involved in your life and God has blessed you and been good to you. And it's not because he's okay with you. It's because he's good and you need to have faith in him. You need to trust in him. You need a relationship with him. Because just because you're blessed in this life doesn't mean that the blessing extends to the next life. That only happens for those who are not just blessed by God, but saved by God. And that's the situation that Hagar is in. And I believe that the reason that she is sent back is for safety. She's young, she's far away from home. She's pregnant, she's in the wilderness. They're surrounded with a lot of bad nations. We've heard of them previously in Genesis, including the Canaanites. These are really dangerous people. She's vulnerable and in danger. So is her baby. So out of love, I think God sends her back. So then Ishmael is going to be born and ultimately is born. His name means God hears. And he's gonna be a wild donkey of a man. So I grew up in the city. I don't know anything about donkeys. So I did a little research. I mean, all I know is Eddie Murphy was one in Shrek. That's all I know. And it's a lot scarier than that. So what I found was that donkeys tend to be pretty short. They're really stocky and thick and hairy. So I think they're a handsome animal. Like, wow. Regal. So they're short, they're stocky, they're thick. They're muscular, low to the ground, low center of gravity. And they are scared of nothing. They'll fight anything. And they can kick with one or two hooves back or to the side, and they'll send you flying. And they're used to protect livestock. So they'll fight hyenas, wild dogs, and coyotes. They are fearless, and they got just really incredible teeth. And once they dig into you, they're gonna tear you up. So there's Abraham, Sarah, the Egyptian. They come together. They birth

Ishmael, a wild donkey of a man who is the father of what people?

- [Congregation] The Arabs.

- The Arabs. The Arabs. And ultimately, here's what we learn about God. There is no hope and there is no hero until the angel of the Lord shows up. Question is, well, is Abraham the hero? Ah, no. Is Sarah the hero? Ah, no. Is Hagar the hero? No. What about this boy? Wild donkey of a man. No. Well, who's gonna fix this mess? The angel of the Lord shows up. The point is our life is a mess. Our family is a mess. Our legacy is a mess. Our parenting is a mess. Our marriage is a mess until the Lord shows up. And unless the Lord shows up, there's no hope whatsoever. And so what happens is God pursues her. She's not looking for God. God is looking for her. She's not calling out to God. God is calling out to her. She doesn't find God, God finds her. She's alone. She's outcast. She's scared. She's rejected. That might emotionally connect with some of you. You're like, I feel isolated. I feel outcast, I feel alone. I feel shunned, I feel a little scared. You know what? The same God who found her can find you. The same God who loved her can love you. The same God who spoke to her can speak to you. And the same God who blessed her can bless you, 'cause it's the same God yesterday, today, and forever. And what we learn about Hagar as well is that it's very unusual for God to show up and just have a direct conversation with a woman. This doesn't happen a lot in ancient literature or in the Bible. But again, this story echoes a story in the New Testament. In the New Testament, there were a rejected, dejected class of people called the Samaritans. The Nation of Israel had the northern and southern kingdom, and in the middle, there were a people group called the Samaritans. They were an offshoot of the family. Somebody married somebody they weren't supposed to. And as a result, they got this whole side of the family that was the deep dark secret and nobody wanted to talk about it. And so the Samaritans didn't really fit. They had their own religion, their own way of doing things, and the Jews felt that they were unclean. So they would walk around Samaria between the northern and the southern kingdom, avoid them. And then Jesus Christ comes to the earth and he doesn't walk around Samaria. He walks through Samaria. And he stops by a well, and he has a conversation with a Samaritan woman who is outcast, dejected and alone. She was there by herself in the middle of the day because her sexual conduct had caused her to be rejected by the other women in the society. She has a lot that is in common with Hagar. And Jesus sat down with her at the well, and he had a conversation with her and he loved her and he blessed her and he saved her. And she became one of the first and great evangelists of the New Testament, going back so that a revival broke out in Samaria. I believe it's the same Jesus who sat with a Samaritan woman who sits with Hagar. And the Bible uses this language, the angel of the Lord 48 times. In the Old Testament, it'll speak of the angel of the Lord and 11 times the angel of God. The Old Testament distinguishes between the angel of the Lord and an angel of the Lord. Volume Two of the Genesis Study Guide is out. Free copy on the way out. Go to realfaith.com in the store, it's free. Download it in PDF format. I get into this in more detail. But when the Bible uses this language, it's distinguishing angels from someone who is far superior and more significant, and that is our savior Jesus Christ. Meaning this, the word messenger is the same as angel. So angel literally means messenger. And so sometimes God sends an angel of the Lord. That's a divine being. That can be what we would

know as an angel or a son of God or the heavenly host, a created, powerful, though limited divine being. And sometimes God sends the angel of the Lord. One of a kind. And that is usually the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe here, Jesus comes down to visit with Hagar. He loves her, he pursues her. He blesses her. He comforts her, he protects her. He reassures her. And it is the angel of the Lord. And she intimates at this where he says, "I will bless you." He's going to be the source of blessing. And she names him El Roi. What she says is this, "I have seen the God who sees me." I think she's literally looking Jesus Christ in the eye, that he has come down from heaven in what we would call a Christophany. It's an appearance of Jesus before his birth to the Mother Mary. And so ultimately, I believe it is Jesus who arrives here. And so here we have the story of Abraham. And let me say this, what I'm trying to do for us in Genesis, and thank you for giving me the honor of teaching, is to take what is 4,000 years old plus and pull it into the future, so that we experience it in the present, and we understand it as we prepare for the future. The Bible is not just about what happened, but about what always happens. And the Bible is not old, it is timeless, and as a result, it is always timely. And so as we look at Abraham, the question is, well, what does this guy have to do with me? Well, he has a lot to do with us, and everything that we're experiencing globally and geopolitically. And so here are the people groups traced to Abraham 4,000 years later. God made a promise that through Sarah's line and Hagar's line, that there would be a blessing and a multiplication. Here we are 4,000 years later asking, did God fulfill his promise? Today, there are 15 million Jews who are physically descended from Abraham through Isaac and his wife, Sarah. One of those is the President of Ukraine. Some interesting people. The Jews historically have not been a large people group, but they have been a significant people group. Today, there are 436 million Arabs descended from Abraham through Ishmael and his mother Hagar. God told these two women, you're gonna be blessed and there's gonna be a lot of people that come from you. And that is true. And what's interesting is through Abraham's line comes the 12 tribes of Israel. Through Isaac, and then through Ishmael, come 12 sons. The both sides have 12. 12 tribes, 12 sons. That's the physical descendants of Abraham. How about the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the religions? There are two primary cults that are traced to Abraham. The difference between a cult and a religion is this. A cult starts as sort of Christian or pseudo-Christian, and then departs from Christian essentials, but still claims to be a Christian, and therefore is very deceiving. A religion didn't come from Christianity, doesn't claim to be Christian, so it's less confusing. Cults, there are 16 million Mormons, 8 million Jehovah's Witnesses. Within religions, there are 2.4 billion Christians, 1.9 billion Muslims, and 2 million Orthodox Jews. The Christians, we would see ourselves as the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Many, if not most of us, are Gentile. We're not Arab. We're not Jewish. There are Jewish Christians that love Jesus. There are Arab Christians that do love Jesus. For example, right now there is a strong, vibrant, young, underground growing church in Iran and in Iraq. And they are sick of dictatorships and they are sick of Sharia law. And so just because you're Arab doesn't mean you're Muslim. There are some who are, in fact, Christian. And then the 2 million Orthodox Jews would see themselves as carrying forth the faith of the Nation of Israel that was established through Abraham. What's interesting is the fastest growing religion on the earth is Islam. At current rates, perhaps in the next 30 years, barring some great evangelism or awakening, the number of Muslims on the earth will outnumber the number of Christians. It is, in large part, because wherever Christianity

has spread previously there has become prosperity. This is in Europe and America. Once prosperity comes, then people no longer have a full appreciation for God. They settle into sort of a selfish lifestyle of consumption rather than worship. The birth rate goes down. It wasn't for immigration, our nation would be in decline, which is a crisis for any civilization. Conversely, Muslims tend to have more children and whoever puts people in the future gets to decide what happens. So we're in the middle of this really interesting period during our lifetimes of world history. And so let me talk a little bit about Islam. And so what happens is Islam begins with the birth of Muhammad in 570 AD. So we go from Abraham to Jesus, completion of the New Testament, expansion of the church, and then the birth of Muhammad. He's called the prophet, he's a false prophet. He then has what he would call a revelation, I would say it's a demonic deception, for the founding of Islam in 610 AD. And what happened was, because Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, and Isaac was the favored and Ishmael was the rejected, the Arab peoples who descend from Ishmael, there is bitterness and there is hurt. And this is a family feud that goes all the way back to the beginning. And as a result, they want to be the promised child. They want to be able to see their mother, Hagar, as the beloved and chosen one, and their father, Ishmael, as the first born and favored. And so there is this longing, among largely those in the Arab world, to have this story retold. Well, all of that opens an opportunity for Muhammad. And what happens then, he has what he would call revelations. I believe they're demonic deceptions. Everything that God creates, Satan counterfeits. And here, with Abraham having two wives and two sons and two nations, Satan has an opportunity to counterfeit what God is creating. And so ultimately, the Koran comes into existence as their holy book, and they see Ishmael as the hero of the story. And what happens is the story of Abraham is retold and in the Koran and in Islamic teaching, Sarah was the rejected wife, Hagar was the accepted wife. That Isaac was not the first born son. That instead Ismael was born first. So all of God's promises are to Ishmael and his Arab descendants, not Isaac and his Jewish descendants. Do you see where 4,000 years later this leads to constant ongoing geopolitical crisis and controversy? And we're Americans. We don't understand this 'cause you go to school and you're like, they didn't tell me this. Yeah, they're too busy telling you about like gender spectrum. And so you're like, you're trying to figure out who you are, rather than how the world is architected. And so we don't understand the world. So as Americans, we look at geopolitical conflicts like this and we're like can't you just hug it out? They're like, no, no, no. This is actually our mom versus your mom, and our side of the family versus your side of the family. This is a family feud that has been going on for 4,000 years. And so the way they retell the story is that all the promises are fulfilled through Ishmael not Isaac. And then they even retell certain stories in the Bible. So if you come back, and I know some of you won't, but if you do come back, I know how it works. If you do come back, there's a story coming up where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The Koran retells the story that God asked him to sacrifice Ishmael. And they say that, instead, an animal was chosen to be sacrificed. And so they have an annual feast within Islam, a holy day, that is the counterfeit of Passover. And they have the counterfeit feast and the counterfeit sacrifices and the counterfeit story. In addition, it is believed that Ishmael settled in Mecca. You wonder why Mecca is such a holy place. It's believed that Ishmael settled there. And every year, during the ritual pilgrimage, they just said that it'll be reopened this year, it has been throttled and limited, but historically, upwards of a few million people will make this

pilgrimage every year. It's one of the pillars of Islam. It's something you're supposed to do as a good Muslim at some point in your life is to make this pilgrimage to Mecca. They say that Hagar was in the wilderness with Ishmael, searching frantically for water, and God supernaturally provided, and a springs came forth from the dry earth under the feet of the young Ishmael. And so this pilgrimage to Mecca includes this sort of reenactment where they're wandering in the wilderness and then stopping to draw water from what they would consider a sacred well. And Muhammad is believed to be a direct descendant of Ishmael, and Abraham figures prominently in the Koran. He appears 69 times, more than anyone else other than Moses. See, what's really interesting is, sometimes people are like we're two consenting adults just doing what we want, it doesn't matter. 4,000 years later, yeah, it does. Yeah, it really does. And you wonder why you've got this small nation of Israel surrounded in large by Arab nations. And those who are in Israel, you would think, would really love Jesus. And sadly, they don't. Sadly, they don't. There's only 2 million practicing Orthodox Jews on the earth. You can't practice Judaism today 'cause you need a temple, a sacrifice and a priest. Those are all gone with the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, 'cause he is our great high priest. He is the temple, the presence of God on earth. And he is the lamb of God, slain to take away the sins of the world. So you can't even be a faithful practicing Jew today because you can't do what the Bible commands. In addition, when the Holocaust hit, many became, not Orthodox Jews, but reformed Jews, and Israel today has the highest concentration of atheists of any nation on the earth. They came to the conclusion that God must not exist if he would allow to happen to his chosen people. And so all of this is traced back to Abraham, and you've got one nation surrounded by many nations. Jesus came from this nation, but most in this nation don't love Jesus. And it's surrounded by nations that come from Abraham, but they don't love Jesus either. It's how you get the three teams. Christians who love Jesus. Most of us are Gentile. Jews, some do love Jesus, but most do not. Arabs, some who do love Jesus, but most are Muslim. And here's the big idea. You don't have to be a physical descendant of Abraham, you need to be a spiritual descendant. Blow your mind here. Was Abraham, at this point in the story, a Jew or a Gentile? He's a Gentile. He's not going to inaugurate Judaism until he circumcise himself, coming up. Let me tell you, guys. if you're gonna skip a Sunday or a weekend, that's a good candidate right there. He circumcised himself. He's like 99 years old. That's a man of faith. So there you go. Shouldn't have said that, but it is true. So it's like, Pastor Mark, what are you gonna say? I don't know, pray for me. But at this point, he's a Gentile. So the big idea is this. It's not about who your father is, it's about who your faith is in. He believed the Lord, he trusted in the Lord. And what happens is the Jews and the Arabs say Abraham is our father, which is true. But the question is, is God your father? By birth, you can have Abraham as your father. Only by new birth can you have God as your father.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- It's through faith. So today, the question is where's Abraham? I'll show you where he's at today. This is the Cave of the Patriarchs. This is where Abraham is right now with Sarah. This is where they're buried. We know where it is. Coming up later in Genesis, they purchase a cave. The location is announced, and this is where Abraham is buried. That structure is built by King Herod. If you say I've heard of that. Well, his family was a dynasty that ruled during the days of

Jesus, and his family actually tried to kill Jesus as a baby. So this dates, basically, to the time of Jesus, it was built. Herod was a great master craftsman, an architect, one of the most significant in the history of the world. This is the last standing, fully preserved Herodian structure on the earth. And it's over the tomb of Abraham and Sarah. It's now called the Cave of the Patriarchs, and it is considered a holy place by Jews, Muslims and Christians. And so they make pilgrimages there. So initially, it was likely controlled by the Jews. And then the Christians came in and built a church on top, and then the Muslims attacked it and tore the church down and built a mosque. So then the Christians came back and attacked them and tore down the mosque and built the church. And then the Muslims came back and tore down the church and built a mosque. And then the Christians came back and attacked the Muslims and tore down the mosque and built a church. This has been going on for a very long time. And depending upon who was in control of this burial plot for Abraham and Sarah, if your team was in charge, you would limit the access of others. So depending upon who was in charge, there would be multiple steps up to the grave, and if you went beyond the seventh step, you were killed. Wars have happened here. Conflict has happened here. What's interesting, this conflict between Hagar and Sarah, between Ishmael and Isaac, it continues at Abraham's grave to this very day. It's a 4,000 year old family feud. It finally reached the point where they came to an agreement that they would have two separate entrances. They can't even enter through the same entrance. The family really doesn't get along. How many of you have got... Now don't raise your hand How many of you have got, you're like our family does not get along. We do not do Thanksgiving together 'cause there are knives. We just don't. It's too risky. It's just too.. We'll cut the turkey and the uncle, that's what we do. It's just too risky. They really don't get along. So they have two separate entrances. The Muslim entrance is guarded by the Palestinian military. The Jewish entrance is guarded by the Israeli military. If you try to go in the wrong entrance, they'll shoot you. And the Jews have access to about 19% of the cave. The Muslims have access to about 81% of the cave. And they reached an agreement. There are 10 high holy days in Islam and 10 in Judaism. Again, everything that God creates Satan counterfeits. So they have come to an agreement. Well, on your 10 days, you can visit our side. And in our 10 days, we'll visit your side. In 1994, 29 people were shot and killed and 125 were wounded here. It is still a place of geopolitical conflict. Today, if a descendant of Ismael tries to enter in through the entrance of a descendant of Isaac, or vice versa, it will make the news and we'll have a global crisis. So here's the big idea. The fight is, we are the descendants of Abraham and this is our religion. The answer is, we don't need more religion. We need more redemption.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- We don't need to have manmade religion. We need to have God-provided redemption. The point of Abraham was not to bring us Judaism or Islam, but to bring us Jesus Christ as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the blessing to the nations of the earth. The whole point of Abraham, the whole point of the Bible, the whole point of human history is that we are the problem and that God alone provides the solution, not through our son, but through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the whole point of this is they need Jesus. We all need Jesus. The Jew need Jesus. The Arabs need Jesus. The Gentiles need Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus. In

the story, Hagar is a sinner. Ishmael is a sinner. Sarah is a sinner. Isaac is a sinner. Abraham is a sinner. It's all sinners. They all need a savior. What's not going to save them is religion. The only thing that's going to save them is redemption. And so the whole point is this, Jesus came through the line of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac, as promised. Jesus came to fulfill all of the prophecies and promises given through the Jewish prophets, that he would be born of a virgin, that he would be born in the town of Bethlehem, that he would live without sin, that he would perform miracles, that he would die on a cross in our place for our sins, that he would be buried with the rich in his tomb, that three days later he would rise from death. In this great week of the year, I'm gonna hit all of this on Good Friday about his death, and Easter on his resurrection. But the whole point is all of this was promised and prophesied through the Jewish prophets and Jesus comes to fulfill it all. And Jesus came to seek us, as he did Hagar. Jesus is the God who sees. He saw us in our sin. He saw us in our need. We were not seeking him, but he came seeking us. Before we called out to him, he called out to us. And as he spoke to her by name, he seeks you today by name. And he is the God who sees. He came to the earth and he literally looked us in the eye. We hated him and we despised him. So we murdered him and we hung him on a cross and we hung him at eye level. And he literally is the God who sees. He's the God who sees all of the sinners and all of their sin. He's the God who sees all that we are and all that we have done. He knows all of the dark deeds that we seek to hide from the light. And as he's looking at his execution, and those who oppose him, he is the God who sees, he's looking us in the eye, and what he says is, "Father, forgive them." And he dies, so that we can live. And he is cursed so that we can be blessed. And he brings an end to religion and he brings the beginning of eternal redemption. He is the God who sees, and he's the God who hears. And so what we're going to do right now, we're going to celebrate the fact, that like Abraham and Sarah, we can have what is called a covenant relationship with him. And a covenant relationship is not where you are devoted to God, but first God is devoted to you. It is not that you earn relationship with God, but God earns relationship with you through the death, burial, resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. Here's what I'm telling you. It's not the son of Abraham that is the hero. It is the Son of God who comes through the family line of Abraham, who is the hero.

- [Congregation] That's right. And some of you would wonder, I have blown it. I have made bad decisions, bad mistakes, maybe even sexually or maritally, relationally or in regards to family. The good news is this, tells us in the New Testament, we see it illustrated in this story. Even when we are faithless, he is faithful. We don't have perfect faith, but our faith is in a God who is perfectly faithful. And he is a God who sees. He is a God who hears. So my question is, what do you need to tell him? What do you need to apologize to him for? What sin do you need to own? What salvation do you need to seek? God, I'm sorry. God, I've blown it. God, it's in the dark, but you see it all. For you, it's all in the light. Jesus, I need you. And some of you, it's coming back into relationship with God. Not because he has left you, but because you have wandered from him, and we're gonna sing and worship together because he is the God who hears. Father God, thanks for an opportunity to teach your word, have a little fun, and Lord God, thank you that the Bible is the most honest book that's ever been written. And it tells us the truth, that we are not good, and that we are not the hero. That you alone are good. And it's not the son of any mere man, it is solely the Son of God who can overcome sin and bring salvation, who can overcome

religion and bring redemption. So Jesus, we come to sing and pray because you are the God who sees what we have done and hears our cry for salvation. We love you and we thank you for being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Jesus' name, amen.