

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 16: 1-6

TRANSCRIPT

“Ishmael: The Product of Doing God’s Will in the Power of the Flesh”

Now, will you turn with me to Genesis chapter 16 and will you listen as I read the 16th chapter? A word by way of reminder of the context, in the preceding chapters, Abram has been dwelling in the highlands and then in chapter 15, particularly, we have the famous statement, “He believed in the Lord and he reckoned it to Him for righteousness,” and then there followed that most remarkable ceremony of the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant by the symbolic picture of the Lord God through the smoking oven and flaming torch passing between the pieces of the sacrificial animals. Abram was not invited to follow which of course is designed to indicate that this was an unconditional covenant, that is, it is a covenant that God Himself has determined to carry out, a unilateral agreement.

Now, Abram is therefore encouraged and no doubt was tremendously lifted up by that experience. Then chapter 16 is a different story and we read in verse 1:

“Now Sarah, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarah said to Abram, now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarah, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarah took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.”

This relationship was recognized as relationship of husband and wife but definitely a secondary relationship, subordinate to the relationship of Sarah to Abram.

“And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarah said to Abram, may the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me. But Abram said to Sarah, behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight. So Sarah treated her harshly, and 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. He said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going? And she said, I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai. Then the angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority. Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count. The angel of the Lord said to her further, behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction.”

Ishmael means “God hears” or “God has heard.”

"And he will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers."

Now that expression "to the east of" is a possible rendering of the Hebrew expression here, but it is also possible to render it, that he will live in "the face of" or "in defiance of" all his brothers. In my opinion, that is the better rendering of that phrase. This incidentally illustrates something that is well for us to remember. From this pulpit and from other teaching stands throughout Believers Chapel, you will often hear references to the Greek text says this or the Hebrew text says this, and people gain the impression that if you know Greek and Hebrew, then interpretational problems are all solved, and that therefore since one does not know Greek and Hebrew, one is a second class citizen so far as interpreting the Bible is concerned and that is not true.

When a person learns to read Greek and Hebrew, he discovers problems that he did not even know existed when he was reading only the English text as any one who has learnt any foreign language knows. Furthermore, almost all interpretative problems are solved by a reading, careful study of the context, so it is possible for a person who does not know Greek or Hebrew, if he will just get two or three translations which give possibilities of rendering, to study those English translations and by a careful investigation of the context, in almost every case, he will come to the meaning of the passage, because the context will lead him to it.

Now of course, if a person will do that fundamental study and also knows the original language, well, that is a plus but the facts are that many people who know Greek and Hebrew do not do that, and therefore, those who don't know Greek and Hebrew, but who will study the Bible diligently become often better interpreters than those who have more capacity. What I am saying and why I am saying this is that you might realize that if you will get yourself two or three versions and apply yourself to the study of the Scriptures, the fact that you do not know Greek and Hebrew will not be much of a deterrent at all to the understanding of the word of God in a deep sense. So do not get the impression because you do not know Greek or Hebrew, that you cannot discover the meaning of the word of God. God has made it possible for all his saints to understand his word if they will really apply themselves to it. So I think it should be a challenge to you. I think, I will learn the Bible and I will interpret it better than some of these fellows who stand up in Believers Chapel and know Greek and Hebrew. That's your challenge and let me assure you it is possible for you to succeed in that.

Now, we were reading chapter 16, so we better finish it up, verse 13:

"Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, Thou are the God who sees; for she said, have I even remained alive here after seeing Him? I will say a little bit more about that later on. (That expression is capable of a double, perhaps, triple meaning too.) "Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered; so Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael; and Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him." (That is, 11 years after he entered the land with the promises.)

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

Our subject this morning in the exposition of the 16th chapter of the Book of Genesis is “Ishmael, the Product of Doing God’s Will in the Power of the Flesh.” The experiences of Abram, the father of the faithful, are similar to those of the children. He dwells on the mountain tops where it is fresh. The air is bracing and exhilarating. Heaven is near enough to be touched, it would seem. But then he dwells also in the valleys, where the air is heavy and confining and the mountains seem far away. It is when one is in the valleys, if we may use that illustration, that the life of faith becomes difficult and demanding. Abram’s life was not like a roller coaster, but nevertheless it was one of peaks and valleys and as we would put it; he had his ups and downs. That in itself is illustrative, it indicates to us that the true Christian life is not a life of constant advance, of constant success, and we must not, in our affirmation of the perseverance of the saints, interpret that to mean that their life is one continuing, road of progress in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapters 13, 14, and 15, Abram has spent his time in the upland meadows, but he now stumbles again and slips down the side of the hill to the lower levels of life. The occasion, the historical occasion of his misstep was Sarah’s reasoned and reasonable suggestion that after 10 years he take her maid and produce the seed through her.

In some respects, we might think that Sarah’s suggestion was a very selfish suggestion. No wife would ever want to make a decision like this, and so it is a reflection of the faith that she had in the promise of God. She believed that God intended for Abram to have a seed, and consequently, we must give her credit where credit is to some extent due, that it was a selfish decision in some ways, but nevertheless, it was a wrong decision and that is very plain from the teaching that we have had up to this point on the subject of marriage.

God had said to Adam, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper.” Not helpers but a helper, and then He had also said at the conclusion of that paragraph, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife,”-- not wives, and they two, not three or four, shall be one flesh. So while we are sympathetic with what was going on in Sarah’s mind to some extent, we must admit that it was wrong. It was clearly, so far as we can tell, contrary to the word of God.

Now, Abram, capitulated to female pressure, and of course, we men will all have sympathy with that. We can understand how he capitulated. The text says, “Abram listened to the voice of Sarah,” and the interesting thing about it is that that’s the precise expression that was used of Adam in the Garden of Eden. He listened to the voice of Eve and he fell; and so Abram repeats the mistake. So he capitulated to female pressure. He also shirked the responsibility for his action, for those words in verse 6 seem to me to be something of a shirking of responsibility. It is true that he was speaking truth; that is, Hagar was under the authority of Sarah, but he seems to want to wash his hands of the responsibilities himself and so he says, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.”

“But the fundamental error of Abram and Sarah is that they rested upon human reason and human effort. That is the basic error of the heart of legalism. It is not surprising, then, that the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, draws upon this incident in the fourth chapter and speaks of Ishmael as the son that was born according to the flesh. And the Apostle uses this as an illustration, this experience and the one later on in chapter 21 as an illustration of how those who seek to gain acceptance before God by

the things that they do shall not inherit the blessing of God. So, Ishmael is born according to the flesh, and the son of the bond woman shall not inherit with the son of the free, Paul says.

So, fundamentally then, this was a turning to human reason and human effort, and of course, God must condemn that work. Human works have no value in themselves before God. What emerges then illustrates the fact that God will fulfill his word in his own way. He will not fulfill his word in our way. He will fulfill his word, but He will also fulfill his word in his way. That is important. All human efforts and human schemes are rejected, so the promise seed's birth, who turns out to be Isaac must be seen be a divine miracle, traceable to God's will and to God's power, and that is what Paul does as he expounds this in Romans, chapter 7. He says that Isaac is the seed who was born according to promise and it is this that glorifies God. So, it is not only vain and foolish, but sinful to help God out.

God helps those who help themselves. You hear even Christians say, but that is the voice of human reason. That is the voice of an idea that is contrary to the word of God. If we have to have some kind of rule like that, and I do not know, why we have to have it, we would say, God helps those who cannot help themselves but who turn to him for help. He does not help those who help themselves. He will not share his glory with anybody and he will not share his glory, in the birth of Isaac, with Abram, Sarah or Hagar.

The conception of Ishmael is described in the first six verses of the 16th chapter. Abram has been in the land now for 10 years. He had entered the land with the promises in his hands. Everything seemed lovely as he came in to the land, but now, 10 years have elapsed. He still has the promises. They have been confirmed but he does not have any seed. It was of course a very reproachful thing for a woman and a man in those days to be barren of children and to be barren of children was regarded as a reproach from the Lord.

You will notice that Sarah expresses her ideas in tones of the knowledge of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. She says, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children." She realized that ultimately this inability to give birth to a child was traceable to the will of God. So, we could say that Sarah adheres to the doctrine of the decretive will of God. But, evidently, she feeling the shame of barrenness is the first to weaken.

But this act is softened by several things and I do not want to overly criticize Sarah, but criticize her as the text of Scripture seems to justify. In the first place, this practice of giving one's maid to one's husband was not an unknown thing. We will later have it in the 30th chapter of the Book of Genesis when Rachel does the same thing with Bilhah, her maid, in giving her to Jacob, and so the idea was known in biblical language and experience and history, but it was also illustrated in several of the sources from outside of the biblical literature. So, it was a sanctioned practice. It was an evidence of some selflessness on her part, a belief in the seed and a willingness to sacrifice her own relationship to Abram by introducing a third party.

And then I think there is something else we should bear in mind, because I don't want to criticize her too much. Remember that while the Bible has, up to this point, stated that Abram is to be the father of a seed, it has not been stated clearly that Sarah was to be the mother of that seed. Now, in the 15th chapter, when Abram is disturbed

about Eliezer inheriting, God had said in the 4th verse, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." Well, He does not say, from your own body and from Sarah's own body, but from your own body. So, so far as the revelation at that point was, Sarah might well have said, "God has not said that the seed would come from me. He has said, "The seed shall come from you, Abram." And so why can we not fulfill the word of God by having Hagar be the mother and you the father?"

And I am sure that there was quite a bit of talk about who was barren, was it Sarah or Abram? And from this we learn that at this time, it was Sarah who was barren. So, in spite of these things, we must nevertheless point out that this was wrong. It was due ultimately to an inability to see that God fulfills his word, even when natural means may have to be bypassed in order for it to be fulfilled. Sarah could only think that God could fulfill his word by natural means, and so she was hoaxed to this activity of the flesh.

Now, this principle, I want to stop for just a moment and make an application or two, because this principle is a very important principle in biblical truth. It has application to so much of the life and work of a local church and so much of the life and work of an individual, an individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us just take evangelism as a beginning. We preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and we are convinced that the Holy Spirit brings men to Christ. There is hardly an evangelist traveling around the country who would not agree to that statement that it is God who saved souls, but, oh, how we have developed all kinds of human means in order to expedite the decision making process and so we have long, lengthy emotional appeals. We have appeals to raise hands in meetings, we have appeals to come down front, we have appeals to pray through, we have appeals to sign decision cards. Evangelism is conducted as if God saves and we also are the ones who bring them to Christ in that secondary sense. We are not willing really to practice what we preach, that is that God saves men through his word. We are not willing to preach his word and allow the Holy Spirit to bring men to Christ. That is one application of the principle.

It has its application also in Christian giving. Many of our Christian institutions, many of our Christian churches believe that it is God that supplies the needs of the saints, but we are exposed to pledge systems, cost and appeals from the pulpit, we are urged to give, we are exhorted to give, we are often hit over the head if we do not give, we are embarrassed if we do not give. All kinds of schemes have been originated in order to gain, get men to give to the work of the Lord.

Now, so far as I can tell from the word of God, there is no justification whatsoever for anyone of the Lord's people ever asking for money for himself in the Lord's work. It is possible to ask for money for others as the apostle did for the poor in Jerusalem, but that is not like asking money when you yourself are to benefit from it. Scripture teaches that God will supply the needs of his saints and he will support work that he calls into existence and consequently if he calls a work into existence, he will support it, and if he stopped supporting it, it may well be that he has finished with the use that he intended to make of that particular work and there is no embarrassment about closing doors and closing the shop, if God has withheld funds.

We believe, I am speaking for the elders, we believe in Believers Chapel that the Lord's work is supported by the Lord's people and consequently we believe that if we

will do the work of the Lord and preach the gospel without equivocation, we will preach it firmly and definitely and without apology. We preach it as much like the apostles as is possible and attract to ourselves all of the reproach and [indistinct] that the Apostles did. We will preach the hard things as well as the easy things and we believe that if that is so, if that is God's will, he will bring people to the support of that ministry, people who like to have the word of God proclaimed and who wrote it proclaimed in a forthright way.

And if we preach the cross of Christ, God will supply the funds and of course that is what has happened. You have been responsive to it. You have responded to the ministry of the word. You have supported the work. We do not pass any collection plates in Believers Chapel, because we do not feel that those of you who are not believers yet should be asked to contribute to the Lord's work. He supports His own work and you have responded and our needs have been met, and we feel it is our responsibility to preach and that you will respond as the Holy Spirit works in your heart. We will not rely upon fleshly appeals.

We will not urge you to give. We will not put pressure on you to give. We expect you to respond in gratitude for what Christ has done and so far as the present elders are concerned, they want to continue that policy until our Lord comes. We would like for this to be a testimony to the grace of God. You support the radio ministry. There are many thousands of dollars that go into the radio ministry. There are many thousands of dollars that go into the tape ministry. It is not self-supportive. You support it, you who give. This ministry is your ministry because you have responded to the giving and you have given out of gratitude without pressure, and we intend to keep it that way.

We feel that when you will lean on the arm of the flesh, the glory is a divided glory. It is partly the Lord's and it is partly ours and he does not like to share his glory with us. He wants the full amount of the glory for himself. So we should continue to do that as long as God's people respond. If they do not respond, we do not blame them. Maybe He is going to do something else and we will close the doors. We would not feel bad. God has worked. He has supplied needs. He has accomplished the spiritual work. He does not always work through any particular agency. He is not limited to us, unfortunately.

So you know this principle applies in family life too. How often has a father become a Christian and then resorted to all kinds of schemes and devices in order to put pressure upon his wife to believe? How often has a wife been converted and then has engaged in all kinds of schemes and devices in order to trap her husband into believing rather than relying upon the same power that brought that individual to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

There was a woman in Dallas some years ago, a very good friend of mine, and still is a good friend of mine. She does not live here any longer, and she has learned the lesson that she had not learned at this time, when she was a very young Christian. She had become a Christian and she was a very strong character anyway and she was so anxious to have her husband become a Christian that she tried every scheme that was possible. She invited every Bible teacher often for supper hoping that the Bible teacher would engage her husband in conversation and lead him to the Lord. She had all kinds of schemes. I remember one in particular. She thought if I could just get Bob Theme who is coming to town, Bob Theme would be able to convert her husband.

And so Bob was coming to stay at my house and so she called over and she said “Lewis, I hear Bob’s coming to town and if I could just get him over to the house for supper, I just feel that he might be the instrumentality.” Well, of course, that is fine, perhaps, Bob would be the instrumentality. So we arranged the meal and we sat down to eat, and she spoke, I would imagine 75% of the conversation was carried on by her, and when we left that night about two hours and a half later, Bob turned to me and said, “Anybody could see why he is not a Christian.” [Laughter] The problem was with her. She was scheming and inventing devices and pressuring her husband and no wonder that she was having no response. This principle is, I say, a tremendously important principle. God fulfills his promises and he also fulfills his promises in his own way and in his own time. Remember that, “in his own time.”

Well, the act is described in a delicate euphemism. Abram went in to Hagar and she conceived, and the results that follow seem to be successful. I would imagine that there was some basis for Sarah saying to Abram, “Well, the plan is working handsomely,” because Hagar is pregnant, but she overlooked one significant thing. The plan seemed to be working handsomely and incidentally that too is an illustration of how so many immature people look at the Lord’s work in various places, and some work that is not the Lord’s but goes under the banner of the Lord, and they look at the size of the buildings and sometimes the size of the congregation and the membership and they say God must be blessing that work. Not so, not so.

It may have appeared that the Lord was blessing the union because here is the child on the way, but polygamy has now taken place. The mother of envy, the mother of jealousy, the mother of strife, and now that polygamy has reared its head, all kinds of evil consequences shall come. The baser elements in man are unleashed by this act and you can see them in Sarah and Hagar and also in Abram. There was Sarah, for Hagar, I can imagine that when she became pregnant, she thought in her heart, “Sarah speaks about being such a spiritual Christian, she acts as if she is a great believer in this Jehovah, her God, but she has been prevented from having children. That is an evidence of God’s lack of blessing upon her and now I have become pregnant and that is the evidence of God’s blessing upon me.

Evidently, Sarah is a hypocrite. She acts as if she knows this God, but she does not because he is punishing her by not giving her children. And so the creation of false pride in the heart of Hagar by this incident is illustrated. There was sorrow to Sarah because she had to drink the dregs of this bitter cup of gall that this maid of hers is now the mother of the child, or to be the mother of the child of her husband, and so she breaks out in irrational blame of Abraham. “May the wrong done me be upon you; I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight.” It was Sarah’s suggestion, but she wants now to throw the blame upon her husband, and finally there was resultant sorrow for Abram.

There is a false rejection of responsibility and no doubt stung by Sarah’s bitterness, it introduced an element into their relationship that was not good. Furthermore, he later became attached to his son Ishmael and it was difficult for him to obey God when God said ultimately to send Ishmael away. So, you see the difficulties that arise from our failure to follow God’s will follow us after the decisions are made.

You know the difficulties of the Christian life are not really the things that come to us by working of divine providence. The tragedies of life are very difficult. The

experiences through which we go that God has put in our lives by his providential arrangement of circumstances, they are not easy to confront. Most of you in this auditorium have had some experiences that are not good. You had some tragedies in your life. You have lost some loved ones. It is not easy, but let me say this, that the difficulties of the life of a Christian are, most frequently, the difficulties that result from the persistent manifestation of the flesh or self-life of the believer. The difficulties that arise in our lives are most frequently the products of the sin principle within us. When men think or boast of having become a believer in Jesus Christ that the sin principle is thereby dying or dead, as some would have it, it peeps out in their very assertions of their sinlessness; it is well to remember that.

Now, Hagar has an encounter with the angel of the Lord, she has been driven out from the presence of Sarah and Abram by harsh treatment. How often the angel of the Lord finds us in our extremity, and even Hagar who has been guilty of this relationship, is found by the angel of the Lord and those two questions that he asks her are such fundamental questions of life that it is almost as if they form a kind of text that you could extract from this passage and preach on it apart from the context in which it is found.

“Where have you come from and where are you going?” It is good question to ask everyone of the audience. Where have you come from? Where are you going? But of course this was an attempt on the part of the angel of the Lord to bring Hagar to her senses to realize what has happened and so he addresses them to her. He is interested in her and the Lord will even turn this incident into a source of blessing for her in the promises that he will give to her.

Who is this angel of the Lord? Well, I want you to look at verse 7 and listen as I just read these words, “now the angel of the Lord,” verse 9, “then the angel of the Lord,” verse 10, “moreover the angel of the Lord,” verse 11, “The angel of the Lord,” and then verse 13, “then she called the name of the Lord,” not the angel of the Lord, the Lord, who spoke to her, “Thou art a God who sees.” You see the angel of the Lord is another of the pre-incarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ. We call them theophanies, appearances of God, and here is an appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why, why do we have the series of appearances of the Lord in the Old Testament? Well, to prepare Israel for the incarnation when in the manger in Bethlehem, there would be a babe that would be born who would be no newcomer to this human scene, but one who had down through the years, come forth, as Micah says, for ministry to the Nation Israel, so that they would not be able to say, “Our God is one Lord only and not a trinitarian God.” Christians believe that God is one, but they believe He subsists in three persons and this was designed to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah.

Now the angel gives comfort to Hagar, it is a three-fold comfort. He promises her first of vast number of descendants. We read in verse 10, “I will greatly multiply your descendants, so that they will be too many to count,” and out of Ishmael, shall come a great number of people, a vast nation. Out of Isaac also come a vast nation, but out of Ishmael shall also come this vast number of descendants, but there is an important difference between them. In the case of Isaac, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called and from Isaac there shall come spiritual blessing that shall affect all the families of the earth,” but no such blessing is promised to Hagar and to her seed. A numerous body of descendants, but no spiritual blessing is set forth.

She is promised a son, secondly, but she is also promised that the son is going to be a wild donkey of a man. What a strange expression? The reference is to the beautiful, swift onager, the wild ass, that when it is grown, is so wild that it can hardly be captured at all. Job writes about the wild ass in the 39th chapter of his book and describes him in very beautiful language and Ishmael is to be a wild ass of a man, very suggestive of the life of the bedouin, down through the centuries and of course, this is at the root of the present conflict today, the conflict down the centuries between the Arabs who trace their descendants, their origin back to Ishmael, and also the Israelis. So that today, the Israeli-Arab conflict is traceable to this act of Sarah, in which appealing to human flesh and the activity of human reason she suggested to Abram that Hagar be the mother of the seed. All the results are of our acts of sin.

Now, finally the consequences of the divine encounter are expressed in verses 13 and 14: "Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "Thou art a God who sees." Now the Hebrew expression may be, "Thou art a God who sees," may mean "to see" in the sense of "care for." Thou art a God who sees" in the sense that "Thou art a God who cares for individuals," because God has interrupted her in the midst of her journey back to Egypt and has told her to go back and return and submit. He cares for her and he has given her great promises here. That may be the meaning or it may be, and I prefer this, "Thou art a God of seeing or God of vision," that is, he is a God who is a visible God and furthermore, he is a God who manifests Himself.

She goes on to say, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" The meaning of that clause incidentally is simply this. She knew that if she were to look upon the face of God, she would die. That was well known, and so she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing him?" She is startled to realize that she has looked upon the face of God and she is still living. She does not yet know the difference between looking upon God in his essential being and looking upon that manifestation of God in the angel of Jehovah.

The difference between looking upon God in his essential being and looking upon the face of Jesus Christ who is God, or it may mean as I have suggested, to you, it's more preferable to me, from the Hebrew text, "Have I even seen here after the one who saw me," and so she was evidently in the presence of this being, the angel of Jehovah and she averted her eyes evidently because of the glory of his presence, did not look into His face, fearful of that, but as He moved away, she looked after Him and she saw, to put it in the language of Moses, as experience of God. She saw the back parts of the angel of Jehovah. "Have I even seen after the one who has seen me?"

I think that is what is involved in this because it does agree with the later experience of Moses who said, "Show me Thy glory," and God said I cannot show you My glory directly, Moses, but I will hide you in the cleft of the rock and I will let you look at me as I pass by, and the text of Scripture says that Moses was hidden there as God passed by and was able to look at the back parts of Jehovah as He went by and evidently this is the same kind of experience. So, what she has learnt then is that this God, the angel of Jehovah, is a visible God and He is a self-manifesting God.

Well, that was tremendously important of course because she was an Egyptian and she thought of God as being like those blind Egyptian idols that stare with stony gaze out over the desert, like the Sphinx. But the God now that she has come into contact with, she learns as a different kind of God. He is a living God. He is a God that you can

see, and he is a God who sees you and cares for you. So, he has blessed Hagar with an experience and an experience that she told when she came back because Abram named the child Ishmael, “God hears.” “God has heard.”

Well, the chapter concludes with some results, description of the results of the union. The son is born, he is named, Abram obeys the word of God, names him Ishmael, formally acknowledges him as his son, and also due to the natural relationship between a father and a son, he hopes, he hopes that this is perhaps the seed God has promised, and later on he has a little difficulty because he thought so much of his son, Ishmael. Still, no heir after 11 years. You have need of patience, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, after having done the will of God, that you might receive the promise; so Abram still waits. He has the promise of God, but he still must wait.

Well, there are lots of lessons here, I do not have time to speak of them, let me just enumerate some of them. We find here a beautiful illustration of the fact that we are often most susceptible to temptation after the experience of great privilege. Abram has had the great privilege of observing the ratification of the unconditional covenant and it is right then, perhaps basking in the blessing of God, he was most susceptible to weakness, to temptation. And is not it interesting too that the strongest temptations often come to us from the least expected quarters?

Abram must have thought, “Well, I better look to those kings of the East; they’re liable to come back, but actually the great temptation came from his own wife, the one closest to his bosom, Sarah. That does not mean, men be suspicious of your wives and wives be suspicious of your husbands, but it does mean that the test might come from them. It also illustrates that crooked ways lead to evil results always; inevitably, those missteps lead to bad consequences.

Perhaps, the most important lesson though is the peril of doing God’s will in the power of the flesh and what happens then is that we become devoted to our own interpretation of our own destiny. We think that we can work out our own destiny in a way that will be pleasing to the Lord. You cannot do that. You must be submissive. You must be willing by the grace of God to submit to his interpretation of your destiny. You must be willing to accept what comes to you as from him and you must look for him in those circumstances to accomplish his perfect will for you. Ishmaels arise out of disobedience. The crop of nettles is still troubling Israel even to this day, but it also is a beautiful revelation of the tenderness of the Lord in dealing with sinners in the angel’s capture of Hagar and bringing her back to the family of Sarah and Abram.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not really speaking directly to you. Your need is personal trust in Jesus Christ, a recognition of your sin, a recognition of the need of repentance in faith, accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then that aligns upon Him that brings life.

For believers, may God help us not to lean on the arm of the flesh in the experiences of our Christian life, but to lean on the arm of our great sovereign Lord, waiting for Him to accomplish His will in His own way, in His own time.

Let us stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee Lord for these ancient illustrations of important spiritual truths. Deliver us from trust in the arm of the flesh. Why should we appeal to men when we have the mighty God to lean upon? O Father! We magnify Thy name. By Thy wonderful grace, draw us to Thyself. Bring us to yielding up to Thee and to leaning

upon Thee, and if there should be some here who have not come to know Christ yet, give them no rest nor peace until they rest in Him who loved them and gave Himself for sinners. This we pray Jesus' name. Amen.