

Hymns: 26 Trust and Obey 7 God Will Take Care of You
Scripture: Psalm 34:1-8; 62:5-8; 71:1-9

We've been hearing a lot lately about **waves of foreigners**, with **terrorists** among them, hitting our shores and crossing our borders – seeking to bypass immigration laws and still share in the blessings that we enjoy. As political wrangling of an election year heats up, one of the hottest topics involves building a wall to keep them out.

As Christians, we have to wonder whether God is bringing these people here for us give them the Gospel, or as a judgment against us, or perhaps both. You've heard the expression “nature abhors a vacuum.” That too might at least **partly** explain what's happening.

According to ChildTrends DataBank, the number of live births in 1955 per thousand U.S. women of child-bearing age (fertility rate) was 118. Over the years, that number has plummeted nearly in half.

*...rates have since gone down, and are the **lowest in recent history**, standing at 63 per 1,000 women in 2013.*

Without a doubt, births are important to families, to nations, and to God.

In our study today, we'll see how **child bearing** weaves it's way through the plans and purposes of God. Along the way, we'll touch on the keywords *handmaid* and *Egypt* to help us begin to understand just what went wrong with the Dispensation of Promise.

Review

Let's begin today's study with a brief review. We're continuing our task of understanding the Bible by looking at *dispensations* which are defined as periods of time when God operates with man in a particular manner. The word *dispensation* literally means *economy* or *stewardship*. So far, we've covered dispensations one, two, and three.

1. Innocence – Adam – ending in the fall and the curse
2. Conscience – Noah – flood
3. Human Government – Nimrod – scrambled languages

Last time, we began looking at the fourth dispensation called *Promise*. In that study, we learned about *covenant* in general and God's covenant with Abraham in particular.

Each dispensation comes with a test for man to perform. In each case, man **fails** the test and God brings **judgment**. Eventually, man will realize that God alone can meet his needs. Unlike most of the other dispensations, **in** the fourth, these **failures** are a bit less obvious. In this study, we'll start examining failures to better understand the judgment that came from God.

So what was God's new requirement for man? From last time, we recall that God went to great lengths to explain to him His promises and that His promises **would** happen. It was up to man to **trust God** and operate in conjunction with those promises.

What did He promise to Abraham?

1. The **land** of Canaan
2. Innumerable offspring (**seed**) that included kings and nations
3. **Blessing** of the whole world through him.

Let's begin looking at how these chosen people of God failed to trust His promises.

Gen.12

*[10] And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into **Egypt** to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

*[11] And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into **Egypt**, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:*

*[12] Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and **they will kill me**, but they will save thee alive.*

*[13] **Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister**: that it may be well with me for **thy** sake; and **my soul shall live** because of thee.*

[14] And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.

Then Pharaoh took Sarai into his house, but God sent plagues as a result.

[18] And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

[19] Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

What do we have here? The great Abram, the

man of faith and

friend of God,

fleeing the Promised Land and telling his wife to **deceive** the Egyptians with him regarding her marital status.

God told him he would be a great nation. He didn't have any children yet, but he feared for his life. For God's promise to come true, the Egyptians could **not** kill him.

Despite Abram's missteps, the Lord showered riches upon him in Egypt, and he returned from Egypt to Canaan with great wealth.

As we learned previously, in Genesis 15, the Lord

explained,

expanded upon, and

formally pledged

His covenant with Abram. Tucked away in that same passage, He also **revealed** to Abram another future event saying:

*[13] ...Know of a surety that thy seed shall be
a stranger in a land that is not theirs,
and shall serve them;
and they shall afflict them four hundred years;*

[14] And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

As we just saw, Abram went to Egypt and came out with “great substance” himself. Could that have been a foreshadowing?

The Lord predicted **Israel's slavery in Egypt**. That was the judgment to come. But why did God afflict Israel with this very harsh judgment? Let's move on and look for some clues.

Gen.16

*[1] Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an **handmaid** [which can be rendered slave], an **Egyptian**, whose name was Hagar [which means flight].*

*[2] And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, **the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my [slave];***

it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

*[3] And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her [slave] the **Egyptian**, ...
and gave her to her husband Abram **to be his wife**.*

Notice **twice** the scripture indicates that Hagar, Sarai's personal slave, is an Egyptian. That fact must be significant. Let's move on.

[4] And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived:

*and when she saw that she had conceived, her **mistress** was despised in **her** eyes.*

Why did Hagar hate Sarai after Hagar conceived? We're not told, but in a way we can understand. She was given to Abram as his wife. It's natural for a wife to be in love with her husband and want him as her own – especially when they have a child in common.

*[5] And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon **thee**: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, **I** was despised in **her** eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.*

Note, she's **blaming her husband** here (like saying “It's all your fault”) for the mess caused by his doing what she demanded. Take note here young men. Marriage may not always be a bed of roses.

Seriously though, she did have a point. Abram should have just told Sarai

he would **not defile himself** in that way and

he would **neither** take **God's** purposes in **his** own hands.

Regardless of who's at fault, this evil demand by Sarai and Abram's lack of character to stand up to her has created **one of the greatest conflicts in human history**. Sin has consequences.

[6] But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy [slave] is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee.

And when Sarai [an Israelite] dealt har[sh]ly

same Hebrew word *ä·nä'* as God used to describe to Abram the prophesy of Israel's slavery in 15:13 and also used in Exodus 1:11,12 where it describes Israel's **bondage** in Egypt.

with her [an Egyptian], she fled from her face.

Note that an **Egyptian slave** (Hagar) is treated harshly by her **Israelite mistress** (Sarai).

*[11] And the angel of the LORD said unto her, **Behold**, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name **Ishmael** [meaning whom God hears]; because the LORD **hath heard** thy affliction.*

*[12] And he will be a **wild man**; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.*

The Lord then instructed her to go back to her mistress Sarai, and she did.

As we see the **chaos** erupting in developed nations brought to them by the sons of Ishmael (the Arab nations) we're reminded that this *wild man* (or more literally *wild donkey of a man*) heritage continues to this day and is played out in our daily news.

Let's pick up the story where the Lord describes what He will do through Abraham's wife Sarah. Here we will also see the **utter failure of both** Abraham and Sarah. Note the Lord changed their names in the beginning of Genesis 17. Speaking of Sarah, the Lord said:

Genesis 17

*[16] And I will bless her,
and give thee [Abraham] a son also of her:...*

*and she shall be a mother of nations;
kings of people shall be of her.*

*[17] Then Abraham **fell upon his face**, and **laughed**, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is **an hundred years old**? and shall Sarah, that is **ninety years old**, bear?*

*[18] And Abraham said unto God, O that **Ishmael** might live before thee!*

Notice Abraham **laughed** at God's statement as he contemplated the **absurd promise** of God. Then, he *instructed* God how *He* should fulfill *His* promise – using the son produced as the result of his and his wife's scheming.

We'll pick it up next in Genesis chapter 18

Genesis 18

[9] And they [two angels and the Lord] said unto him [Abraham], Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

[10] And he [the Lord] said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo,

Sarah thy wife shall have a son.

And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

*[12] Therefore Sarah **laughed within herself**, saying,*

After I am waxed old

shall I have pleasure,

my lord being old also?

[13] And the LORD said unto Abraham,

*Wherefore did Sarah **laugh**, saying,*

Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

*[14] **Is any thing too hard for the LORD?***

From there, we know the story. The miracle birth of Isaac **did happen** just as God said that it would.

Gen.21

*[1] And the LORD **visited** Sarah **as he had said**,*

*and the LORD **did** unto Sarah **as he had spoken**.*

*[2] For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, **at the set time** of which God had spoken to him.*

*[3] And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, **Isaac** [laughter].*

[4] And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

*[5] And Abraham was an hundred years old, **when** his son Isaac was born unto him.*

*[6] And Sarah said, God hath made me **to laugh**, so that all that **hear will laugh with me**.*

*[7] And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, **that** Sarah should [nurse] children []? for I have born him a son in his old age.*

Isaac grew up and married Rebekah who **was barren** for twenty years. Isaac prayed, and Rebekah bore twins – Jacob and Esau.

Jacob was a scheming deceiver. He stole the birthright and blessing from his brother Esau. He then was tricked by his scheming and lying uncle Laban to marry Leah his older daughter before marrying his beautiful younger daughter Rachel. Rachel **was also barren**. Do you notice a trend here?

Genesis 30

*[1] And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, **Give me children, or else I die**.*

[2] *And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?*

[3] *And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall **bear upon my knees** that I may also have children by her.*

[4] *And she gave him Bilhah her [slave] **to wife**: and Jacob went in unto her.*

Leah bore Jacob six sons; her handmaid, Zilpah bore him two; Rachel's handmaid bore him two; and finally Rachel bore him two. He had four wives and twelve sons by them which went on to become the twelve tribes of Israel.

Application

As we saw, this dispensation focuses on the promises of God and man's responsibility to trust that God will do what He has promised.

Matthew 1

[1] *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

[2] *Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Juda[h] and his brethren;*

Those words just roll off the page, but if we consider the **fragile thread** that produced them, we have to marvel at our miracle-working God. The 100-year-old Abraham and 90-year-old Sarah begat Isaac whose name means *laughter* because of how **absurd** such a thing was to consider. Isaac was a miracle baby.

Isaac married Rebekah who was also barren. Unlike his father, he never took that into his own hands, but simply asked God for a miracle. After twenty years, the Lord responded and gave him the twins Jacob and Esau. Jacob then reverted back to the missteps of his grandfather Abraham – taking multiple wives.

Of course, the Lord wanted these men and women to trust Him and believe that He was the covenant-keeping God. **We** can do no better than to trust Him as well. *Is any thing too hard for the LORD?* As we grapple with seemingly unsolvable problems, we need to remember God is greater than every one.

The familiar verse Proverbs 3:5 reminds us:

[5] *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;...*

And finally, it's our privilege to be counted the **children** of God as we trust in God's great promise of new life through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of another miracle baby, the miracle-working Lord of all: Jesus Christ.

Benediction

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that worketh in us,*

Unto him be glory in the church

by Christ Jesus

throughout all ages,

world without end.

Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

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