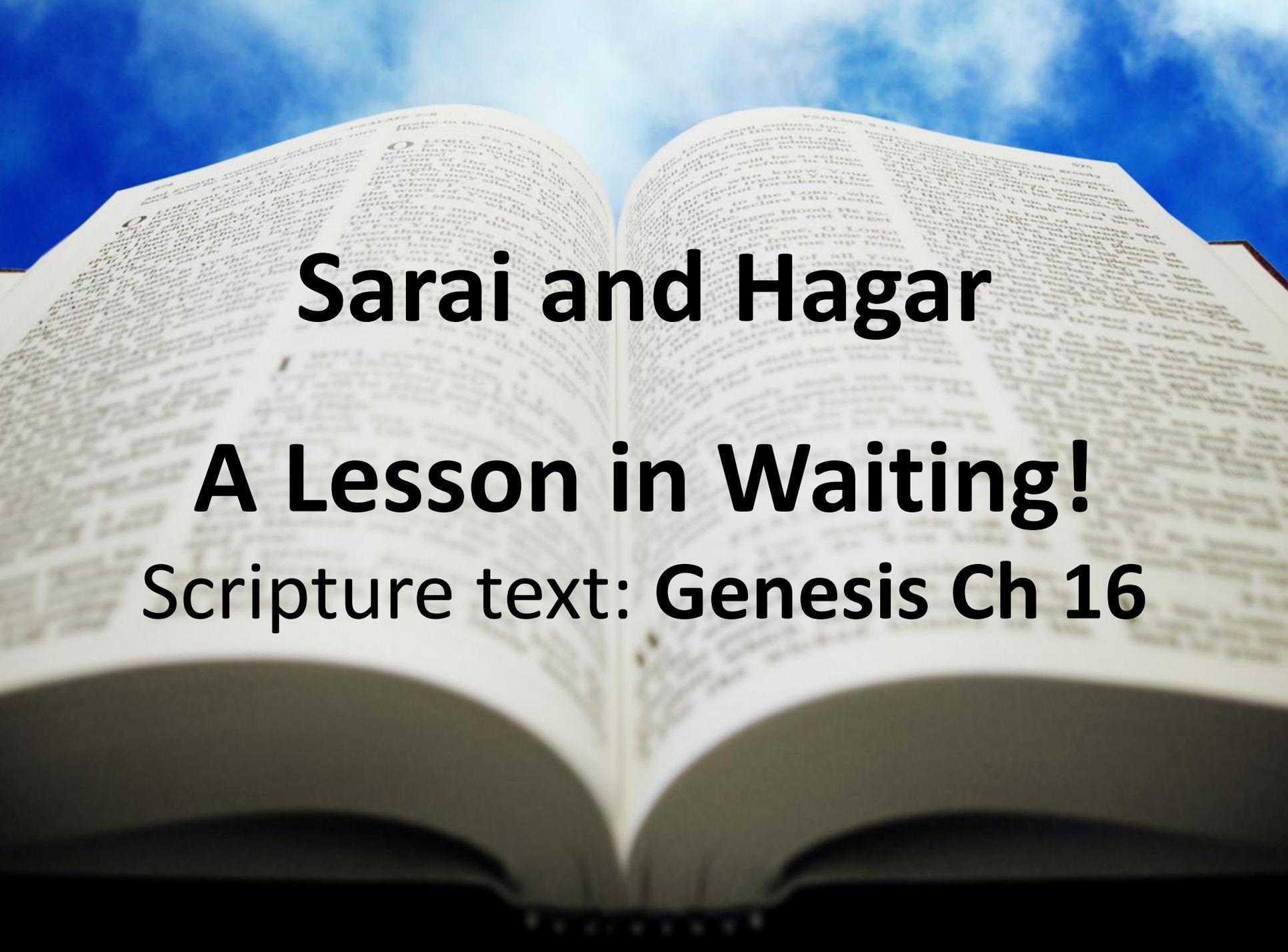


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Sarai and Hagar

A Lesson in Waiting!

Scripture text: **Genesis Ch 16**

Genesis 16 records a painful **detour** that Abraham and Sarah made in their pilgrim walk, a detour that brought conflict not only into their home but also into the world. **What today's journalists call "the Arab-Israeli conflict" began right here.**

But this account is much more than ancient history with modern consequences. **It's a good lesson for God's people about walking by faith and waiting for God to fulfill His promises in His way and in His time.** As you study the stages in the experience of Abraham and Sarah, you will see how dangerous it is to depend on your own wisdom.

Waiting ...

Abraham was now eighty-five years old. He had been walking with the Lord for ten years and had learned some valuable lessons about faith.

God had promised Abraham and Sarah a child but had not told them when the child would be born. **It was a period of waiting, and most people don't like to wait.** But it is through “faith and patience [that we] inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).

Hebrews 6:10-14 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, **but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

God has a perfect timetable for all that He wants to do.

After all, this event was not the birth of just another baby: It was part of God's great plan of salvation for the whole world. However, as Sarah waited for something to happen, she became impatient.

Why did God wait so long?

He wanted Abraham and Sarah to be physically **“as good as dead”** (Heb. 11:12) **so that God alone would get the glory.**

At age eighty-five, Abraham was still virile enough to father a child by Hagar; so the time for the miracle baby had not yet arrived.

Whatever is truly done by faith is done for the glory of God (Rom. 4:20) and not for the praise of man.

Hebrews 11:11-12 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, **even when she was past the age**, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him **as good as dead**, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Romans 4:18-21 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, **which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.** No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, **but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.**

A willingness to wait on the Lord is another evidence that you are walking by faith. “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28:16). Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:11 and amplified its meaning: “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.” (The same Holy Spirit inspired both Isaiah and Paul, and He has the right to make these changes.) **Whenever we stop trusting God, we start to “make haste” in the wrong direction and we end up being ashamed.**

Isaiah 28:15-17 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter"; therefore thus says the Lord GOD, **"Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'** And I will make justice the line, and **righteousness the plumb line**; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter."

Romans 10:8-11 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (*that is, the word of faith that we proclaim*); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.** For the Scripture says, **"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."**

A third evidence of faith **is that you are acting on the authority of God's Word.** "So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). **You can act by faith, and know that God will bless, if you are obeying what He says in His Word.**

Hebrews 11 records the mighty acts of ordinary men and women **who dared to believe God's promises and obey His commandments.**

Romans 10:15-18 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.** But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for **"Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."**

Finally, whenever you act by faith, God will give joy and peace in your life. **“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing”** (Rom. 15:13). Conflict may surround you, but you will have God’s peace and joy within you.

Romans 15:13 May the **God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing**, so that by the **power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**

These, then, are the evidences of true biblical faith:

- (1)** you are willing to wait;
- (2)** you are concerned only for the glory of God;
- (3)** you are obeying God's Word; and
- (4)** you have God's joy and peace within. While Abraham and Sarah were waiting, God was increasing their faith and patience and building character (James 1:1–4).

Then something happened that put Abraham and Sarah on a painful detour.

James 1:1-4 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

Scheming (Gen. 16:1b–4a)

Sarah knew that she was incapable of bearing a child but that her husband was still capable of begetting a child. **God had specifically named Abraham as the father of the promised heir,** but He had not yet identified the mother.

Logically, it would be Abraham's wife; but perhaps God had other plans.

Sarah was “**second-guessing**” God, and this is a dangerous thing to do.

Remember, true faith is based on the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and not on the wisdom of man (Prov. 3:5–6), because “**faith is living without scheming.**” Sarah said, “**It may be**”; she did not say, “**Thus saith the Lord!**” God had told Abraham, “**Know of a surety**” (Gen. 15:13); but Sarah had no such assurance on which to base her actions.

Furthermore, **Sarah was not concerned about the glory of God**; her only goal was “that I may obtain children by her” (16:2). Perhaps there is a hint of disappointment with God and even blaming God when she says, “**The Lord hath restrained me from bearing**” (16:2). It has often been said that **God’s delays are not God’s denials**, but Satan whispers to us, “God is holding out on you! **If He loved you, things would be different! Blame Him!**” (See 3:1–6.)

Genesis 3:4-6 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil." So when **the woman saw** that the tree was good for food, and that **it was a delight** to the eyes, and that the tree **was to be desired** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--**the desires of the flesh** and **the desires of the eyes** and **pride in possessions**--is not from the Father **but is from the world**. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but **whoever does the will of God abides forever**.

Abraham's taking Hagar as a second wife was perfectly legal according to the marriage code of that day. In later years, Jacob would marry his wives' maids, Bilhah and Zilpah; and each would give him two sons. Moreover, the plan seemed to be successful, for Hagar conceived a child. Perhaps Sarah was right after all.

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and **hold fast to his wife**, and **they shall become one flesh**.

But not everything that is legal or that appears to be successful is approved by the will of God. God never accepted Hagar as Abraham's wife; the Angel of the Lord called her **"Sarah's maid"** (16:8). Later she was called **"this bondwoman and her son"** (21:10), not "Abraham's wife and son." Why? Because **"whatever is not of faith is sin"** (Rom. 14:23). God rejected the whole enterprise because He had something far better in mind for Abraham and Sarah.

When you review the **four evidences of biblical faith** that were explained above, you can see that Abraham and Sarah **did not pass the test.**

They were unwilling to **wait on the Lord** but rushed ahead with their own plans.

They acted only to please themselves and not to **glorify God.** They were not **obeying the Word,** and what they did certainly did not **bring joy and peace** to their hearts or their home.

Scottish novelist George MacDonald was right when he said, **“In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably, or succeed more miserably.”**

This leads us to the third stage in Abraham and Sarah’s “detour” experience.

Fighting (Gen. 16:4b–6)

When you follow the wisdom of the world, you will end up warring like the world (James 3:13–18).

Of all fights, family fights are the most painful and the most difficult to settle. Had Hagar maintained the attitude of a servant, things might have been different; but she became proud, and this irritated her mistress (Prov. 30:21–23).

James 3:14-18 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Proverb 30:21-23 Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and **a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.**

Is this not what Hagar desired?

“Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” Paul asked (Gal. 3:3); and you see this illustrated in Abraham’s home. He and Sarah had begun in the Spirit when they put their faith in the Lord, but now **they had turned to the flesh for help**; and some of the works of the flesh were starting to appear (Gal. 5:19–21). **Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar were at war with each other because they were at war with the Lord, and they were at war with the Lord because they had selfish desires warring within their own hearts** (James 4:1–10).

Galatians 5:18-21 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, **that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

James 4:1-4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? **Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, **so you fight and quarrel.** You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The first thing they should have done was build an altar, worship the Lord, and tell Him their problems. They should have confessed their sins and received His gracious forgiveness.

Once you stop fighting with God and with yourself, you will have an easier time not fighting with others.

The first step toward reconciliation with others is **getting right with God.**

However, **instead of facing their sins honestly**, each of the persons involved took a different course; and this only made things worse.

Sarah's solution was to blame her husband and mistreat her servant as she gave vent to her anger. **She seems to have forgotten that she was the one who had made the marriage suggestion in the first place.** Abraham's solution **was to give in to his wife and abdicate spiritual headship** in the home. He should have had pity for a helpless servant who was pregnant, but he allowed Sarah to mistreat her.

He should have summoned them all to the altar, but he did not.

Hagar's solution was **to run away from the problem**, a tactic we all learned from Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). However, you soon discover that **you cannot solve problems by running away.**

Abraham learned that when he fled to Egypt (12:10ff). There was peace in the home for a short time, but it was not the "peace of God." It was only a brittle, temporary truce that soon would fail.

4. Submitting (Gen. 16:7–16)

James 4:1–10 explains why Christians fight and how Christians can be at peace. Our battles among ourselves are caused because we obey our three enemies: **the world** (James 4:4), the **flesh** (4:1), and the **devil** (4:7).

How can we expect to be at peace with God and each other if we are living for the enemy! “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God” (4:6–7).

Hagar had to submit to God (Gen. 16:7–14). This is the first appearance in Scripture of the Angel of the Lord, who is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis 16:10, the angel promised to do what only God can do; and in 16:13, **Hagar called the angel “God.”** These pre-Incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl surely reveals His grace and love.

His servants Abraham and Sarah had sinned against the Lord and against Hagar, but the Lord did not desert them.

The angel called her “**Sarah’s maid,**” which suggests that **God did not accept her marriage to Abraham.** Apparently Hagar was on her way back to Egypt when she met the angel, but God told her to return to Abraham’s camp and **submit herself** to her mistress. That would take a great deal of faith, because Sarah had mistreated Hagar before and might do it again.

God then told her that she was pregnant with a son **whom she should name Ishmael** (“God hears”).

While he would not be Abraham’s heir in the blessings of the covenant, Ishmael would still enjoy blessings from God since he was Abraham’s son. God promised to multiply Ishmael’s descendants and make them into great nations (21:18; 25:12–18), and He did; for **Ishmael is the founder of the Arab peoples.**

Ishmael would be a “wild donkey of a man” (16:12), which is not a very flattering description.

It identified him with the wilderness where he lived by his skill as an archer (Gen. 21:20–21; Job 24:5).

It also revealed his independent and contentious nature.

He would be a hated man, living “in hostility toward all his brothers” (*Genesis 16:12 He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.*)

While we must not apply these traits to every descendant of Ishmael, the centuries-long hostility between the Jews and the Arabs is too well known to be ignored. The Arab nations are independent peoples, dwelling in the desert lands and resisting the encroachments of other nations, especially Israel and her allies.

Hagar's wilderness experience brought her face-to-face with God and taught her some important truths about Him.

She learned that He is **the living God who sees us and hears our cries when we hurt**. The name of the well means **"The well of One who lives and sees me."** He is a **personal God, concerned about abused people and unborn babies**. He **knows the future and cares for those who will trust Him**.

Hagar did return and submit herself to Sarah. Surely she apologized for being arrogant, for despising her mistress, and for running away. **She trusted God to protect her and her son and to care for them in the years to come. We never solve life's problems by running away. Submit to God and trust Him to work things out for your good and His glory.**

Sarah had to submit to God. How did Sarah feel when Hagar came back to the camp and reported that God had talked with her? Did God have time for a poor servant? Was God concerned about a slave-girl's baby? Did the God of Israel care for an Egyptian? **Yes, because that Egyptian's baby had Abraham as a father; and God had a covenant with Abraham.** The record does not tell us how Sarah responded, but it would appear that she accepted both Hagar and her report and took her back as her servant. Sarah did not mistreat her again; for, after all, **God was watching!**

Abraham had to submit to God. In this entire episode, Abraham played a rather **passive role**. He let Sarah talk him into marrying Hagar, and he allowed Sarah to mistreat Hagar and drive her from the camp. **Apparently, Abraham did not offer to help Hagar in any way.** (Later, he made up for that—Gen. 21:9ff.) But when his son was born, **Abraham acknowledged him and obediently gave him the name that God had appointed.**

Both Abraham and Sarah **had to learn to live with their mistakes**. Certainly Abraham enjoyed watching the boy grow up, and the old man's heart was full of love for him (17:18). But **Abraham knew that Ishmael would not be a permanent part of the covenant family**. God's solution to the "Ishmael problem" was not to blame Abraham, Sarah, or Hagar, **but to send another baby into the home—Isaac**. Ishmael did not give Abraham and Sarah any trouble **until Isaac came along**; then he started to create problems (21:1–11).

As you review the chapter, you will see that several key texts from Romans are illustrated by what is recorded here.

“For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Be sure that your plans and procedures can pass the four “tests of faith” outlined above. People may agree with you, and the law may defend you; but **if God cannot bless you, don’t do it!** Let God accomplish His will in His way and in His time. Sarah tried to run ahead of God, and she created problems that are with us yet today.

“They who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life” (Rom. 5:17). In Genesis 15, grace was reigning through righteousness because of Abraham’s faith (15:6); and Abraham was reigning in life to the glory of God. But he **abdicated the throne** in chapter 16, and **sin started to reign**. Unbelief, impatience, anger, pride, and indifference took over in Abraham’s home and almost destroyed it. **God’s people are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6), who should “reign in life” by yielding to Jesus Christ (see Rom. 6:11–14).**

Romans 6:11-14 So you also must consider yourselves **dead to sin and alive to God** in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). This does not mean that God winks at sin or that abundant sinning is the key to abundant grace (6:1–7). Rather, it means that God’s grace is greater than man’s sin and can accomplish God’s best even when men do their worst. In grace, God saw Hagar fleeing to Egypt; and He came to her and met her needs. He made her the mother of a great nation. Of course, He did it because of Abraham; but God’s covenant with Abraham **was a covenant of grace.**

From the human viewpoint, this “detour” was a tragedy that brought God’s great salvation plan to a standstill. Consider, however, the divine point of view. God is never caught by surprise. When He cannot rule, **He overrules**; and **He always accomplishes His purposes**.

Satan wants us to think that our “disobedience detours” must become the permanent road for the rest of our lives; ***but this is a lie.***

Like Abraham and Sarah, we can confess our sins, accept God's cleansing (1 John 1:9), and then learn to live with our mistakes. **Yes, there will be pain and regret; but God's grace will overcome in the end.**

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and **to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

George Morrison is worth quoting again:

“The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.”

Praise the Lord, we serve a God of 2nd Chances!

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.