

## Among Us: God Made Visible in the Old Testament

### Week 1: Hagar

I. We're starting a new series of messages today in which we will consider a few pivotal passages in the Old Testament where we see God made visible! What should we make of these occurrences? We should certainly let Scripture speak for itself before we come to any conclusions and that's our intent today.

A. From the onset of creation, God did not force compliance on humanity. Humanity's love for God would be demonstrated through a trusting obedience and it was pretty simple. Enjoy everything I've created for you but stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Creation was perfect and the relationship between God and humanity was perfect. God designed humanity as the crown jewel of His creation and His desire was to dwell among us. The relationship between God and humanity would not be forced. Love requires that a choice be given, and humanity chose to distrust God. There are many workable definitions of the word "sin" but what sin boils down to is:

[Slide]: Distrusting God.

Genesis 3:6-7 [Slide]: 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

1. God says to stay within His parameters because when we step outside His design it will eventually bring harm. Adam and Eve, and all humanity ever since, have said:

[Slide]: Yes, But!

a. Yes, God, but it looks so good, and I want it really badly. I think this one time You might be holding out on me. And we take the bait. It might taste good, feel good, satisfy a craving briefly, but we soon find ourselves needing another click or another hit or another "like", et cetera. Sin never makes good on its initial promise, and it has a way of making our lives:

[Slide]: Very complicated!

Adam and Eve are about to experience a much more complicated life because of sin entering the world.

Genesis 3:22-23 [Slide]: 22 The LORD God said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

2. After the fall, the relationship between God and humanity was altered. God wouldn't be among us in the same way as before. But the relationship wouldn't be in permanent disrepair. We see the narrative of Scripture unfold within time, but we must always remember that eternity is but today in the presence of God.

B. The immutability or unchangingness of God is one of the most important characteristics of our sovereign God. What does that mean? That God doesn't have emotions? That He can't be disappointed in our choices one day and joyful on another day? That isn't what it means for God to be immutable. It means that all of eternity is present before God and God doesn't change His mind like mankind. There is nothing past, present, or future that God is unaware of, and He therefore doesn't change His mind in response to unfolding events! God's will is to dwell among us, period. His plan of redemption was orchestrated before the foundations of the world!

1. There are several years that pass between Adam and Eve and Abram (soon to be Abraham). There were also a lot of ups and downs with humanity, but just after the Tower of Babel in which humanity is scattered, God appoints Abram to be the Father of God's own distinct people. There is nothing that Abram has done to earn or deserve this distinction other than when God told Abram to get:

[Slide]: He got!

2. The promise of God to Abram was to become a great nation, but after many years there wasn't even one child. Abram comes to the logical conclusion that he just misunderstood what God meant. The heir wouldn't come from his own offspring but a servant who's within his household.

a. Listen to what occurs to Abram in Genesis 15:4-6:

Genesis 15:4-6 [Slide]: 4 Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the

starts, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “your offspring will be that numerous.” 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

C. This is the first occurrence in all the Bible with the phrase:

[Slide]: The word of the LORD came...

1. and it just so happens to be in the same conversation that we get the major theme of humanity's redemption:

[Slide]: Justification by faith!

a. Abram “believed” the LORD and righteousness was “credited” to him! The word of the LORD came to Abram which resulted in a personal relationship with God. It's later in this interaction with the LORD that God makes a covenant or unconditional promise with Abram.

b. When God gives a promise, we sometimes falsely assume without reason that the timing of that promise is:

[Slide]: now!

(1) We don't expect to wait. I don't expect to wait. But that's not always the case. Our faith in God calls us to trust in His promises AND in the timing of those promises. It's the second part that usually trips me up. If we ever get tripped up by God's timing, we're in good company.

Genesis 16:1-2 [Slide]: 1 Abram's wife Sarai had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. 2 Sarai said to Abram, “Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family.” And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

(2) This is another one of those big “buts” in the Bible. Anytime something isn't happening on the timetable we want, but there is a loophole, that's not being smart; that's being sinful. Let's not be foolish and think we can outsmart God on a technicality. God did say that Abram would have a son from his own body. God didn't say it would come from his wife, Sarai, but God had already established the covenant of marriage. Abram makes the choice to embrace a half-truth otherwise known as a lie. A half-truth is still sin.

Genesis 16:3-6 [Slide]: 3 So Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the LORD judge between me and you.” 6 Abram replied to Sarai, “Here, your slave is in your hands; do whatever you want with her.” Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

(3) The last time we saw the exact progression of verbs that are listed in verse 3 was at the fall. Sarai “took” and she “gave to her husband.” Abram is complicit because he's passive in the situation. Men are charged with the responsibility of spiritual leadership over the home and when they don't assume that responsibility it opens a floodgate of poor consequences.

(4) Hagar was elevated to the status of a wife and now she was a pregnant wife which gave her a degree of superiority over Sarai. We get to see what is behind the door of a sinful choice and it is a lot of pain and unnecessary complications! Hagar isn't totally innocent in the way she responds with contempt toward Sarai, but neither is she given the dignity due her. She's being objectified. Just like the lack of responsibility in the garden of Eden, Abram and Sarai treat Hagar as an irrelevant object and the situation gets so bad, Hagar heads for home back toward Egypt.

2. God has a covenant with Abram. Abram has a covenant with Sarai as his first wife. Who do we think is going to get the raw end of the deal?

[Slide]: Hagar?

a. I think we need to be very careful with our tendency to place human expectations on God. We tend to categorize people as the good guys or the bad guys and then we place that polarizing view on God. Is it wrong for a terrorist group to enter a country and murder innocent people? My belief is that it is. Is it wrong for one country to starve out innocent people in another? My belief is that too is wrong. But our opinions matter little compared to God's justice and, inadvertently or not, that is what Sarai petitions.

[Slide]: “May the LORD judge between me and you.”

b. Who was between Abram and Sarai? That's right Hagar! What are we asking for when we petition the justice of God? We are petitioning God to make right that which has been made wrong! Be careful what we wish, I mean pray for!

D. How will the LORD step in and make right was made wrong?

What we are about to encounter along with Hagar is unfathomable!

1. We are about to encounter the:

[Slide]: Preincarnate Christ!

a. Genesis 15 gave us our first insight when "the word of the LORD came to Abram." The Jesus we've come to know who was born of a virgin, lived in Judah, died, and rose, is the Word made flesh according to John 1. But the Word is co-eternal with God the Father, and we see His activity in the Old Testament long before the incarnation.

b. But don't just take my word for it! Let's see what Scripture will say.

Genesis 16:9-12 [Slide]: 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority." 10 The angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count." 11 The angel of the LORD said to her, "You have conceived and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard your cry of affliction. 12 This man will be like a wild donkey. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will settle near all his relatives."

We have the angel of the LORD speaking to Hagar and saying the words, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count." Angels are very powerful beings, but they cannot create human beings!

c. What do we make of this phrase "angel of the LORD?" There is intentional ambiguity around the angel of the LORD. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) is a mystery, and we know God is One and yet distinct in 3 Persons. But the relationship and interworking of the Trinity is beyond our understanding. But we do know that angels do not have the ability to multiply human beings.

The Hebrew word for angel is:

[Slide]: Malak

(1) The term can get blurry if we don't recognize an important distinction between the term malak as a messenger or sent One and the created beings we call "angels." Both Old and New Testament make a distinction between the two. "The" angel of the LORD and "an" angel of the LORD should be separated in our minds. When someone encounters "the" angel of the LORD there is no confusion.

d. How did Hagar respond to this messenger or sent One of the LORD?

Genesis 16:13-16 [Slide]: 13 So she named the LORD who spoke to her: "You are El-roi," for she said, "In this place, have I actually seen the one who sees me?" 14 That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi. It is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son (whom Hagar bore) Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

e. There is a lot in a name! There are 3 names involved in this exchange between Hagar and the angel of the LORD and they all indicate that we have a God who has made it known throughout history His commitment is to:

[Slide]: Dwell among us!

He's for the top dog and He's for the underdog and He brings about His justice. Even when we are impatient, buy into half-truths, and show contempt for others. God hears our outcry even when others are unaware. Hagar was a fugitive foreign slave, but God took note of her situation. And she too received a promise. We tend to put God in an either/ or box when He reminds us, He can be both/ and!

(1) The angel of the Lord, who we know as Jesus, "found" Hagar even as she was on the run. He's always been in the business of seeking that which was lost.

He imparted a name to her unborn child and that name was Ishmael:

[Slide]: God hears.

God isn't disconnected from the events of our lives. He hears our laughs, and He hears our cries. He hears everything in between. We are His children. When my children get in the car after school, I love to hear what occurred during their day. It's a delight for me! How much more with God?

**(2) Hagar is a distinguished figure in Scripture because she was able to do one thing that no other female can claim. She had the opportunity to give a name to God! That's quite the distinction!**

**She names God, El-roi which means:**

**[Slide]: The God Who Sees Me.**

**God doesn't just hear our laughs and cries. Perhaps He could do that from a distance. Nope! God also sees! And where is His attention focused? On you and me!**

**(3) The angel of the LORD encountered a foreign woman who was on the run. She was being ostracized for a situation that she was at best a secondary part of, and she found herself in this incredible encounter by a well.**

**The well would become known as Beer-lahai-roi:**

**[Slide]: The well of the Living One Who Sees Me.**

**E. This reminds me of another woman that encountered the Living One by the well in Samaria. She too was ostracized for a situation she was at best a secondary part of. When Jesus found her, she was probably asking if anyone heard or saw her too? Jesus extended an invitation to trust Him as the Living Water.**

**1. God has a track record of finding us where we are, accepting us as we are, and calling us to trust Him as the God who dwells among us.**

**The God who invites us to personally know Him through His Son, the Living One who hears and sees!**