

OUR WAY OR GOD'S WAY?

I would guess that every parent has seen situations where their children have gotten into problems simply because they failed to follow the advice of their parents. It seems that nearly every teenager who has a car winds up having an accident. Parents tell their kids to not speed, to pay attention to what they are doing, and to be careful; but many times this is ignored. Sometimes the consequences of not doing what we should can be tragic. We warn our children to not ride with friends who have been drinking and I know families who lives have been turned up-side-down because this advice was not followed. Children have been killed or severely and permanently injured. The consequences of not following a parent's advice can be serious. Sometimes children just get impatient and do things for themselves that turn out to be a lot less desirable than what their parents would have done for them if they had only waited. An example might be a family that had planned to buy their son a nice sports car for graduation and the son did not wait but went out and paid too much and bought a beat-up used station wagon that was not reliable. He wound up having to get a job to take care of the car and failed to graduate because the lack of study caused him to get bad grades. You can imagine that happening. That's pretty serious in this day and time when a good education is really needed to land a good job.

Abram and Sarai found that doing things their own way had some pretty serious consequences.

Examples:

- When he left the Chaldean area, took his father, brother, and nephew. Caused delays.
- Went to Egypt when a famine came to land of Canaan. Created problems for his wife with the Pharaoh and made Abram fearful for his life.
- Did not get completely away from his kinsmen. Had to rescue Lot. Had disagreement with Lot over grazing for flocks.

It was not that they were rebellious, they were just not fully obedient (might not have been sure that the details really mattered) and maybe somewhat impatient and wanted to help bring about God's plan in their own way rather than putting their full trust in God to make it happen.

This type behavior was not always the case. In fact Abram showed great insight as to how one should live by faith. A good example of this was the situation involving Abram's refusal to take any kind of payment or reward from the king of Sodom after the battle in which Lot was rescued.

God confirmed Abram after that happened by send His word in a vision and assuring him that God was his shield and his reward. (Gen. 15:1) Abram knew that God had blessed him but to him all the material blessings were of little consequence if he was to remain childless. (Gen 15:2) Abram had thought that the promise might be fulfilled by his adopting his servant Eliezer, but God had told him that it would not be through the servant but that his wife would bear him a son. (Gen 15:3) So God gave some additional information regarding his descendants. The initial descendant would be a son from his own body. (Gen 15:4)

One of the best (or worst) examples of Abram and Sarai trying to do things their way involved this promise God had made to Abram regarding having a son by which he was to become the father of a great multitude of people. He had God's promise, but nothing happened.

GENESIS 16:1-3 In the tradition of the culture in which they lived, it was not an uncommon practice for a wife to have one of her slaves bear children for her. In our culture, we have the situation of surrogate mothers in which a human embryo is implanted in a woman who is not the donor of the egg. They did not have that technology in Abram's day. Sarai had thought that she had discovered the way God would give Abram children even though she was barren. So often today we do the same thing in our efforts to bring about the will of God. We want to be practical and look for the "possible" rather than simply take God at His word and wait on Him. It is not uncommon to hear people in churches make the argument that "we really need to be practical in this matter and do what we can to help. After all God

helps those that help themselves." This is exactly what Sarai and Abram did.

GENESIS 16:4a Their plan worked! Hagar became pregnant and I would guess that their initial thoughts were that they had really accomplished something to help carry out the plan that God had for them. However, it did not take long for the results to turn sour. The second half of this verse shows that Hagar became proud and held Sarai in open disdain which created great stress in the household. Hagar thought that she was better than Sarai and probably would liked to have become Abram's only wife.

This turn of events and what followed should have been a clear sign that their plan was not what God intended. The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it. (Pr 10:22)

GENESIS 16:5-6 The story becomes more interesting in that Sarai became very unhappy with the results of her plan and she complained to Abram implying that he was responsible for the problem. Abram gave Sarai permission to punish Hagar and as a result Hagar ran away. We don't know where she was going and it is unlikely she did either. She stopped to rest at one of the oases in the area and the angel of the Lord appear to her as a man.

GENESIS 16:7-9 Several time the "angel of the Lord" appeared to people. In many of the cases the conversation recorded say something to the effect, "the Lord said," which would indicate that this was a manifestation or the appearance of God in human form. The word "angel" literally means "messenger" and does not and should not imply a creature with wings and a harp. Some Biblical scholars argue that the occurrences recorded in the Old Testament as appearances of the "angel of the Lord" is really the Lord Jesus coming and appearing to people.

GENESIS 16:10-12 Abram and Sarai may have acted somewhat irresponsibly in dealing with Hagar. God was not willing to abandon her and He was not willing to let Abram ignore his responsibility in this situation. The Angel of the Lord told Hagar that she would have a son and named the son for her. He also told Hagar about the character of this son and (as it turned out) his descendants. He would be a "wild man." Everything he would do would be confrontational and adversarial. We see this behavior among the people of the Middle East. The people of the Arab nations are very belligerent and difficult to get along with.

GENESIS 16:13-14 Hagar named the Angel of the Lord "the God Who sees me" or El Roi. Many of the names people used for God in the Old Testament were such that they indicated something about the character or action of God. Some of the names found in the Old Testament as Jehovah-jireh (Jehovah sees), Jehovah-nissi (Jehovah is my banner), Jehovah-shalom (Jehovah is peace), Jehovah-shammah (Jehovah is there), and Jehovah-tsidkenu (Jehovah is our righteousness). We would all do well to realize that God is the God Who sees us. We fail to realize that God sees every action and knows every thought of every heart.

Hagar thought it was significant that she had seen "the One Who sees her." She had an encounter with God and she knew it. It is important for each of us to have an encounter with God. We are to seek His face and to know Him.

GENESIS 16:15-16 The angel of the Lord told Hagar to return to her mistress and she did. She had the child and Abram did name him Ishmael as the Angel of the Lord had directed. The fact that Abram was 86 years old and had a son was likely a victory in his own mind. Abram had not realized that what he had done was not in God's plan. He was thinking that he was right in the center of what God wanted him to do.

I wonder how many of us have substituted our own way for God's way in trying to do what we know God wants and do not realize that we are not doing God's will in God's way. Choosing our own way even in trying to do God's will result in problems and even disaster.