

[Hagar The Miserable]

:: genesis 16.1-14 ::

Each Christophany in the Old Testament teaches us a lot about the character and nature of our God. The different scenarios give us specific insights, depending on the circumstances and the context, but in a more general sense each Christophany hammers home the message that God desires to reveal **His Person** and **His plan** to us so that we can live the life that He has prepared for us to live.

In Genesis chapter 16 we have a very special Christophany, where Jesus comes in a pre-Incarnate form to visit Hagar, the wife and servant of Abraham. If you don't count God's visits Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as Christophanies, then this would be the very first appearance of Jesus Christ in the Bible, visiting Hagar in a very trying time in her life.

Let's set the stage.

Genesis 16.1-6 - Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me." So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

Not a lot of great decisions in these verses, but as always Scripture is faithful to accurately record what really happened.

Hagar would've been picked up by Abe and Sarah back in chapter 12 where we read about *another* unfortunate incident involving lies, deception and Sarah becoming a concubine.

Hagar was taken from her homeland as a slave, having to learn a new language, having to learn a new culture, having to start her life all over again.

After 10 years she's told to go in as a wife to Abraham. Whether she should have or not is up for debate. I cut her a little slack as she was a purchased slave who was at the mercy of her masters. Also, the culture and practices of Egypt weren't exactly pure, so we can't be too upset at her compliance with this command from her owners.

After she conceived, it says that Sarai became despised in her eyes.

Your Nelson cross-reference will take you over to Proverbs chapter 30 where we read in verse 21:

Proverbs 30.21-23 -For three things the earth is perturbed, Yes, for four it cannot bear up: For a servant when he reigns, A fool when he is filled with food, A hateful woman when she is married, And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress.

Abraham and Sarah's plan backfired on them and caused a lot of problems in the family, especially between the wives.

So Abraham tells Sarah to do whatever she wants to Hagar. And what Sarah did was to treat her harshly. The word there means to afflict her, to abase her, to hurt her.

And so Hagar flees from the family, heads back toward Egypt by way of the wilderness.

Remember, she's alone, newly pregnant, probably sick and had little or no provisions for this journey.

It is here that the Lord meets her, at this moment in her distress.

Genesis 16.7 - Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.

Even if our Bibles hadn't capitalized the phrase *Angel of the Lord*, which indicates Divinity here, we could look at the evidence and clearly see that this is, in fact, Jesus Christ.

First, when He makes promises to Hagar He says that *I* will do this, not anyone else. He would accomplish these things on her behalf.

Second, at the end of the chapter Hagar identifies Him as the Lord God, so that's a pretty good giveaway too.

Now, Jesus meets her by a spring of water in the wilderness. While we read these verses keep the story of Jesus meeting with the woman at the well in the back of your mind and you will notice some great similarities. That's a personal comparison you can make later in the week.

Genesis 16.8 - And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai".

First of all, there's just something so tender and comforting about Jesus. He appears to Hagar in the middle of the wilderness and demonstrates His Divinity to her by saying, "hey, I know who you are and who your owners are," yet it seems as though Hagar felt comfortable and safe in His presence. She opened up to Him and spoke to Him as if He was a friend or traveling companion.

On the human level, Hagar was justified in her escape from Sarai, who was harshly treating her at best and abusing her physically at worst. In light of that situation, Jesus says in verse 9:

Genesis 16.9 - The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand."

Wait a minute...what's up with that? Hagar answers where she had come from, why she had fled, and then Jesus says, "Ok, now you need to go back."

And though we have the full revelation of the rest of Hagar's life, we need to pause and think about what it would've been like in that moment if we were Hagar and if God had said that to *us*.

Jesus told her to go and submit herself under Sarah. The word submit is the exact same word used up in verse 6 for harshly.

So what Jesus said was, "Go back and be dealt with harshly."

Why?

Genesis 16.10-12 -Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude."

And the Angel of the Lord said to her:

"Behold, you are with child,

And you shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael,

Because the Lord has heard your affliction.

He shall be a wild man;

His hand shall be against every man,

And every man's hand against him.

And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

So, after revealing Himself to her, He revealed His plan to her.

But why must she go back and endure the harshness of Sarah in order for this plan to be accomplished?

We can't do much more than speculate. Eventually Hagar and Ishmael *would* be driven from the home permanently. But why did the Lord want her to go back and not simply to go home to Egypt?

I thought about this for a while and I have a couple of reasons, but really the bottom line is that God's ways are not our ways. Perhaps she would have died on her way back to Egypt, having no provisions, no help and no guidance. Perhaps His desire was to protect her from the paganism and idolatry of Egypt and to keep her in the place where He was speaking and working. As a member of Abraham's household she would receive the blessings that God was pouring out on his life. We don't know why He specifically wanted her to return at this time, but that *is* what He wanted for her.

After that, Jesus explained that He would make a great nation from Ishmael. The news wasn't all good, but it was a clear explanation of His plan for her future.

But not only did He speak prophetically, but He also spoke personally. He said "you will call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction."

And here we find that our God is a God who hears. He is a God who is listening. We have access to the Lord instantly, simply by speaking to Him. He is listening. He hears. He acts. This is why our lives should be characterized by prayer and why we should be expectant in prayer. Never distance God in prayer. Don't bide these teachings which say that we must get into a specific state in order to *really* talk to God. That is not how God has revealed Himself to us. He is a God who is presently listening, presently hearing, presently acting on our behalf.

Genesis 16.13-14 - Then [Hagar] called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-The-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

He is the God who hears and the God who sees. Hagar was left with the understanding that this God who revealed Himself to her would be present in her life, would be active in her life and would give her a life which He had prepared for her. He demonstrated to her that He was a God of knowledge, a God of love, a God of compassion, a God of wisdom and a God who provides.

She followed His command, returned to Abraham, bore her son Ishmael and continued in the path which was laid out for her.

But how does this effect our lives as Christian men?

The principle which needs applying is that God desires to work through affliction. This is a teaching that is laid out very plainly and very often for us in the Bible. When we are afflicted, God uses that affliction in order to glorify Himself, to draw us nearer to Him and to spread the Gospel.

Now, we have the tendency to want to flee from affliction. We often try to escape those harsh situations in life, whether it be problems at the job or problems in our marriages or problems in the family or whatever it might be. The natural man's instinct is to flee. But as we read the Bible we find that Jesus comes and says, "Oh no, don't flee, go back so that I can accomplish my work in that situation. Go back so that I can purify you in that fire, so that I can shine brightly in that dark place, so that the people in that situation can see what a life with me is all about."

Blessing is a good thing. It's a great thing. And God desires to bless us in all sorts of ways. But when affliction comes our purpose is not to escape it. Our purpose is to submit to the Lord in that situation in order to do all those things He desires to do.

Of course, we're not saying that you can never change jobs. We're not saying that you **have** to allow yourself to be physically abused. We're not saying that it's always wrong to stand up for your rights. But when we open up God's word we find that many times He *does* ask us to submit to that affliction. He *does* ask us to forfeit our rights. He *does* ask us to endure opposition and persecution. **Then** we find that the people around us are brought to the realization that we have a hope and a power and a strength that they want. It is **then** that they witness God's provision, God's protection, God's guidance and His grace. And if His people are always escaping affliction then we will miss opportunities to do some of the greatest work possible this side of eternity.

You are a servant of God. Purchased from Egypt, from the world, by the blood of the Lamb. You were brought into a new house where they spoke a new language and worshipped the God of heaven, a house where sacrifices and promises and encounters with God were a frequent thing.

The other people in this house, they aren't perfect, but they are God's people. Affliction comes, as it often does, and though our instinct is to run, God comes to us and reminds us that we can't go back to the old country. We can't return to the place where we once were. There's nothing there for us. There's no provision. There's no protection. There's no purpose. There's no promise. He reminds us that what others mean for evil He will use for good and that when we are with Him, no matter the affliction, no matter the difficulty, His grace and His love will be with us because He sees and He

hears and He understands what it means to submit and endure. And He says "follow Me and I will not only give you eternal life, but I will give you a temporal life that is full and abundant and useful and glorious."

This is how God has revealed Himself in the Bible and this is how God works in our lives today.

So, if you are facing affliction. If you're facing a harsh situation in your life, don't flee. Instead, speak to God, follow His leading and remember that His desire is to grow you through this difficulty in order to accomplish His work in and through your life.