

CHRIST CAME BEFORE CHRISTMAS

GENESIS 16

HE CAME TO SAVE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
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INTRODUCTION

"Do you want to be saved?" I remember hearing preachers ask that question many times as I grew up. To be honest, my answer was "Yes, but not yet." I'm sure some of you would give the same answer today. Very few, if any, come to church without at least some desire for salvation.

But when God starts working in our lives, and starts convicting us of our sin, and our urgent need of salvation, our answer changes to "Yes, I desperately need to be saved." But at that point a new question often arises. It's not a question the preachers asks, but one we ask. It's no longer "How much do you want to be saved?" but **"How much does Jesus want to save me?"** We want saved by Jesus, but does Jesus want to save us? Let's look at Genesis 16 for our answer.

BACKGROUND

When a famous author dies, relatives often find unpublished material among their files. The family will sometimes publish these works posthumously, and mourning fans who had resigned themselves to never again reading a new word from their hero's pen rush to buy this bonus material.

Most Christians delight in reading and re-reading the record of Jesus contained in the four gospels. These four short books reveal so much about their precious Savior. But what would you say if I told you that I knew of some bonus material about him? What if I told you that there were other books - books that most people know very little about? No, I'm not talking about some newly discovered 'Gnostic gospels.' In fact, the books I'm talking about were written hundreds of years before a star appeared in the east.

I'm talking about the Old Testament, of course. The Son of God was present and active long before the incarnation. Yes there were predictions and prophetic pictures of the Son of God in the Old Testament. But there were also times when the Son of God was not only predicted or pictured but was actively present in the Old Testament. That's why I'm calling this Advent series, Christ Came Before Christmas. How did Christ come before Christmas? The first recorded time he came before Christmas was in Genesis 16.

Abram is introduced in Genesis 11 with a record of his genealogy, parents, wife, and early travels. In Genesis 12, God announced His covenant with Abram, including the promise of a son. God renewed his covenant promises to Abram in chapter 15. In chapter 16, Abram runs out of patience waiting for God to fulfill his promise and takes matters into his own hands.



What's the first step in salvation?



1.SIN SETS THE SCENE FOR GRACE (1-6)

Impatience

Despite God's promise of a son to Abram (Gen. 15:4), he's now 86 years old and still no son on the scene. Sarah and Abram's impatience with God leads Sarah to propose surrogacy using the womb of their servant, Hagar. This immoral and abusive act set in motion a train of events that tore their family apart and is still tearing the world apart today.

Pride

Pregnant Hagar looked down on barren Sarah treating her with proud contempt, provoking Sara to jealous rage against Hagar and angry resentment towards Abram.

Escape

Eventually Hagar had had enough, gave in, and gave up in desperate despair. Running away from her home, her family, and the only place of true religion, she ended up in the wilderness: pregnant, unmarried, an Egyptian, a slave, an outcast, penniless, hopeless, and godless.

Sin is abounding and multiplying as are the horrific consequences. In a sinful attempt to create life, Abram succeeded only in destroying his marriage and we are witnessing the impending destruction of two precious lives--Hagar and her unborn child.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Sin always results in death and never results in life. It always ends in evil and never in good.

GOD'S PROMISES
ARE ALWAYS BETTER
THAN OUR PLANS



Sin is abounding. Any hope of grace abounding?



2. GRACE STEALS THE SCENE FROM SIN (7-13)

The God of Grace

The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur (7).

Out of nowhere, a new character appears with no introduction and no background. Who is this? It is the Son of God in human form (not human flesh). The evidence for this will become clearer as we look at other passages in coming weeks, but here's evidence in this chapter.

- **He has a divine name.** 'Angel of the Lord' can be translated as 'The Angel, the Lord.' We must also remember that 'angel' is not so much a description of a celestial being but actually means 'Messenger' (similar to the New testament title of Christ as the 'logos' or 'Word' of God.)
- **He exhibits divine attributes.** The angel of the Lord knows everything there is to know about Hagar, including her name and background (8).
- **He commands with divine authority,** instructing Hagar to return to Abram and Sarai (9).
- **He performs divine actions,** speaking to Hagar as only God can: "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (10).
- **He knows the future,** predicting the whole history of conflict between the Israelites and the Ishmaelites (11-12).
- **He identifies with the Lord,** saying "The Lord has heard" your affliction (11).
- **He is called LORD (13),** or Jehovah/Yahweh by the author.
- **He is called God** by Hagar, who names him "You are a God of seeing" or "The God who sees" (13).

Words of Grace

But look especially at the way the divine messenger deals with her for more evidence of beautiful Christ-likeness? As we do so, ask yourself what passage in the New Testament parallels this one.

- **He found her** (7). She had been running away but the Messenger was running after her. She was fleeing the community of God, but the Messenger of God would not let her go. He knew where she was and came after her.
- **He knows her** (8). He knew her name, history, status, sins. This complete stranger appears in the middle of the desert but knows everything about her.
- **He questions her** (8). He does this for her benefit, not his, as he already knows the answers. "Where have you come from?" and "Where are you going?" He wanted her to consider that for all its faults, she was leaving the place of God's promise, truth, and presence, and running to Egypt, the place doomed to death and destruction. He makes her confront her painful past and hopeless future.
- **He challenges her** (9). "Return" is a call to repent, to turn around and go back to where she came from. Who would take this command from a mere man?
- **He encourages her** (10-12) with the promises of life and a future for her son.



The Appearance of Grace

So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi (13-14).

"You are the God of my seeing" can be translated in two different ways.

"You are the God who sees me/God sees me": Hagar is praising God for his omniscience. She knows he knows all about her. His eye has followed her all her days. These are similar words to the Samaritan woman: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). In this translation, Beer-lahai-roi means 'The well of the Living One who sees me.' God's seeing is often a synonym for his care (Gen. 29:32; Ex. 3:7).

"You are the God of my seeing/I've seen God": Hagar is saying, "I have seen the One who sees me." In this case she is simply stunned that she has seen God and is still alive. This is the more likely translation given that Hagar's next words are "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." In the Hebrew this is in the form of a question: "Have I really seen the God who sees me?" She's just had a face-to-face conversation with God and she's still alive! How unprecedented! In this translation, Beer-la-hai-roi is 'The well of the Living sight.' She gave the well this name either because she's stunned that she saw God and lived or because this sight of God gave her life. Either way it's an expression of deepest humility.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Jesus came to save. Look at the parallels with John 4, where Jesus met another immoral, outcast, Gentile woman beside a well in the desert and questioned her into salvation. It's almost like Genesis 16 is a trial run or a rehearsal for John 4! Hagar's response is very similar to the Samaritan woman "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (Jn. 4:29). Jesus is the only way to see God and live (Ex. 33:20; Jn 1:18; 14:9). There's life in a look at Jesus.

Jesus loves coming to save. These Old Testament appearances gave the Son a foretaste, an appetizer of his future mission. He was, as it were, trying on the clothes of his humanity with "I can hardly wait" excitement and enthusiasm. Charles Drew said: "He graciously adopted such methods to indicate how much he longed for the fullness of time when he should put away their sins and bring in an everlasting righteousness for them." Or as John Calvin put it, "For even though he (Christ) was not yet clothed with flesh, he came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately." Christ came before Christmas.

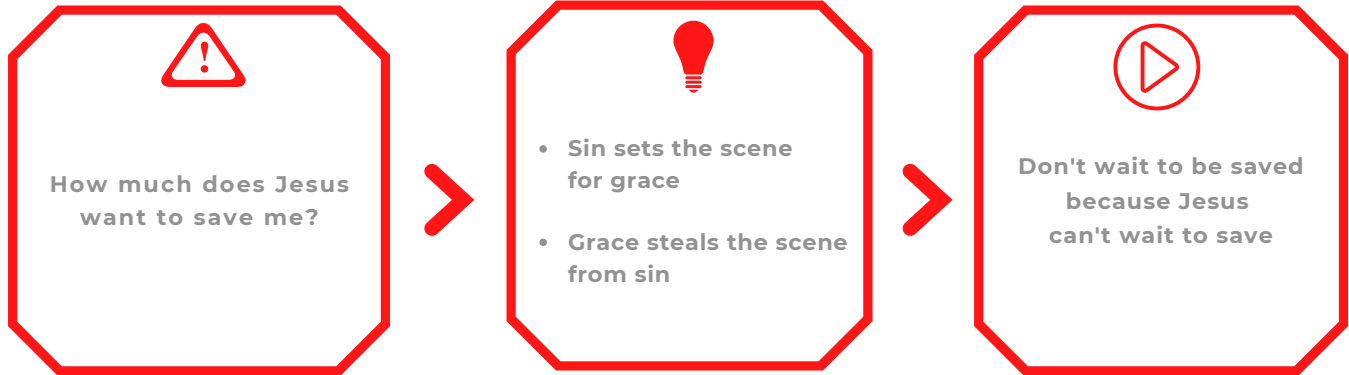
JESUS LONGS TO SAVE
SO WHY WAIT ANY LONGER TO BE SAVED



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the Story > Change others' stories.



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Messenger of the Lord, thank you for coming to save sinners. Please save me and help me to enjoy the wonder of my salvation more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would you worry whether Jesus wants to save you? What reasons might he have not to save you?
2. Can you think of other occasions in the Bible when impatience led to sin?
3. In the 'Words of Grace' section, what similarities are there in the Lord's dealings with you?
4. Are there any times that God has ever appeared to anyone or said anything to anyone apart from through the Son of God?
5. Do you think Hagar was saying "God sees me" or "I've seen God" or both?
6. What does Christ coming before Christmas tell you about Christ's coming at Christmas?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net