

SARA - “Misplaced Hope”



1. **(Q1)** The Hebrew word translated, “sick” here (*hala*) sometimes means “to be rubbed or worn,” “to be made weak or wounded.” It is a poignant word, referring to an erosion of strength. This is even more significant when hope is “deferred”—postponed, or even more so, if one’s hopes are repeatedly dashed.
2. **(Q2-Gen 16)** This is a sobering account. Sarah’s single-mindedness about “getting a baby no matter what” was short-sighted. She never could have imagined that her servant could become a source of grief. She hadn’t thought through the reasonable results of a servant having “power” to do what she was unable to. Sarah’s personal life was made bitter because of her pursuit of what she wanted “at any cost.” But, it’s much, much larger than even that. Ishmael is the patriarch of the Middle Eastern Arab nations. Once again, we are reminded of the “long view.” Would Sarah have concocted the same plan if she knew that countless people over thousands of years would have their lives impacted by her single decision to send Hagar into Abram’s embrace?
3. **(Q3)** Sarah’s error was trying to imagine *how* Yahweh was going to fulfill His original promise to make “a great nation” out of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). She migrated in her inner world from wondering, to imagining, to projecting, to planning, to doing.

She tried to keep her hope “alive” as it is “deferred” year-after-years for 25 years, by readjusting the meaning and method of God’s promise and fulfillment. She kept trying to create some tangible, visible expression of her hope.

4. **(Q4-Ps 31)** The Hebrew verb translated “wait” in this verse appears in 41 verses of our Old Testament. Interestingly, 2/3 of them (27) appear in Job (8) and Psalms (19), a book about struggling to *find* God and struggling to *bring* God into daily life (i.e. worship), respectively.
5. **(Q4-Ps 39)** The verb translated “wait” in this verse is different from that in Psalm 31 above. This time it carries with it the notion of “binding, joining together by twisting, gathering, collecting.” There is the idea here that “waiting” upon God is *not* like waiting for a train. It’s *not* passive. Rather, it’s a very active “binding ourselves” to Yahweh. Of the nearly 50 times it appears in the OT, 2/3 of them appear in the Psalms (17) and Isaiah (15), a prophecy about “hope” and the future of Israel. Most of our most profound Messianic prophecies are in Isaiah.
6. **(Q4-Heb)** It shouldn’t surprise us to discover that of the 75 occurrences of “hope” in our New Testament, *none* are in Revelation, and nearly 1/3 of them are in Romans (16) and Hebrews (6), the two books that deal most extensively with what Jesus has accomplished. Our hope truly is a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” that is planted in the heavenly Holy of Holies. It is *not* merely a warm assurance that things will be better someday.
7. **(Q7)** One of the things difficulty does to us is reduce our options. Hope in God can grow in “places” where nothing else can. In a very real sense, “hope” needs adversity and scarcity more than ease and plenty to thrive.
8. **(Q8)** It would be helpful here, to point the group towards *people*, not passages, in the Bible (e.g. Abraham, Sarah, the disciples *after* the crucifixion in Luke 24, etc.)



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Q1-Gen 15)** The promise of God in chapter 12 adds to their confusion and pain. It was one thing to be childless, but now their childlessness challenges not only God’s goodness, but His veracity! Does He love me? Have I offended Him? These (likely) original questions are now joined by, “Can I trust Him?”
2. **(Q2-Gen 16)** Before we are too hard on Sarah, we need to consider that surrogacy, in terms of child-bearing and wet nursing, were common in the ANE. In some ways, Sarah had concocted an “interpretation” of *how* Yahweh would fulfill His promise to her husband more than simply “taking matters into her own hands.” It made “perfect sense” to her in the age in which she lived, and obviously it was also not odd to her husband. We do the same thing today, albeit slightly more sophisticated! Plus, the fact that Hagar bore a *son* rather than a daughter only seemed to “prove” that Sarah was correct. Yahweh could easily have thwarted her ideas by simply giving Hagar a daughter instead of a son.
3. **(Q4-Rom 8)** Verse 25 is important here too. This is *not* a passage about hope per se. Rather, Romans 8 is an extended discussion on the certainty of our full *redemption*—spirit, soul, and body. It involves our justification, our sanctification, and finally, our glorification. This passage is about that final stage, which, according to Paul, is the hope “in which we were saved.” We mustn’t lose sight of the context here either. We “groan” while we *wait*...in hope! The “groaning” and the “hope” are *not* mutually exclusive.
4. **(Q4-Rom 15)** We need to be cautious here. It would be tempting to conclude that Paul is telling us that there are encouraging “verses” in the Bible. That’s not the point here. The noun *hupōmenēs*, (“endurance,” ESV) is paired with the “strengthening effect” (i.e. meaning of the Greek word behind our English, “encouragement”) of Scripture to produce “hope.” It’s stories like Abraham, Joseph, Jeremiah, and others that strengthen us *to* hope.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Q2-Gen 16)** When have you decided *how* God was going to (or *should!*) do something in your life, rather than surrendering to Him in silence?
2. **(Q4)** Christians seem to have less difficulty waiting for Christ’s return, which is our *ultimate* hope (Titus 2:13) that being patient for God to fulfill specific longings we have for *this life*. Why do you think this is? What might it tell us about which “age” we really prefer to live in, “this present age,” or “the age to come?”
3. **(Q5)** Respond to this statement: “*Typically, when we have options, God is not our first choice.*”
4. **(Q9-10)** Have group members share their responses to these two questions.