

When can I stay up? That's the question of many little girls and boys on New Year's Eve. Parents know they'll never make it, but the kids don't know that. So parents let them try only to find that sometime during the evening they start to lose the battle with sleep. So the answer always must be the same. You'll get to stay up when you're older. Then you'll be able to see the New Year change over.

In perspective waiting for a new year isn't nearly as exciting as some of the things that God's people were waiting for throughout the Old Testament. Great promises stood in front of these people. But they couldn't see it right then. And like whining little children they sometimes struggled to maintain composure while they waited. We have promises made to us that in some ways are even better. Great promises God makes to us about the future. But we can't see it now. Suddenly it's like being little at New Year's all over again and we feel like complaining that we're being left out or that we're going to miss it.

In the first lesson we heard about two of God's chosen people who faced tough circumstances. They had incredible promises, but also incredible periods of time to wait. Ten years Abram and Sarai waited and counting with no visible sign that the promises were any closer. These believers were being put to the test and they were failing. God wants us to examine their situation closely so we see what clues it holds for us. Eventually we want to say...

**We now see the one who sees us
Through his promises to us
Through his help for us**

Children in a marriage are no guarantee. Just ask the thousands of perspective parents out there desperate for a child. Just this week I read about one pair that was encouraged by their adoption agency to advertise themselves to potential birth parents. So they took out an ad on a billboard. Abram and Sarai were just such parents. Desperate for a baby God responded. **"A son coming from your own body will be your heir. Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them...so shall your offspring be."** What a wonderful promise from God, but month after month passed. With each month that Sarai wasn't pregnant the wait got harder.

Some have tried to defend Abram and Sarai saying they were just trying to help the situation. What they wanted was in total agreement with their faith, since all they wanted was a baby which God had promised. How they went about it was totally not in agreement with their faith. Sarai spoke to Abram. **"The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."** Other families of that time had done the same thing and achieved success. So Sarai asked her husband to have a child with someone else that she could then take and raise as her own. Sarai and Abram wanted to speed God's plans along, give God some help fulfilling his promise. Their attitude demonstrated doubt in God's plan to keep his promise and doubt in the strength or wisdom of God to finish what he promised.

Countless trying situations come up in our lives every single day. Situations in which we feel we have a blanket promise from God that he is not keeping or making good on. Shouldn't Christians be wealthy? Others are so I'll hurry that promise from God along by cheating others out of money they deserve. Or don't we have the promise of health? So if I get sick it must be God punishing me for something else. Or we think we have the promise of peaceful death. So when diseases linger or time keeps passing with no sign of death we begin to question whether God has forgotten or forsaken us. Every time God doesn't act fast enough we feel it's our right or responsibility to take matters into our own hands and help God out.

The Lord had not forgotten his promises to Abram and Sarai, and he hasn't forgotten his promises to you. It's by his promises that we know God and see him. **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."** We might distrust his promise of forgiveness for our sins. But the birth of the Word made flesh reminds us that God took care of that once and for all. We might doubt the reality of heaven. But the Savior who came from heaven reminds us that God has already blessed us in the heavenly realms. When we return to the promises we are sure the promises will be kept. Every time we open the Bible we are strengthening our faith in the one who sees us. We see him through his promises to us.

It wouldn't have surprised us if the Lord had simply told Abram and Sarai to butt out of his business. He could handle it without them. Their actions were grounds to have the promises taken away. Instead God came with another promise. This one made for Abram and Sarai through Hagar and the child she carried. God was providing help that they could see. It's really another way we see God, through the help he provides for us now.

When a couple has a baby there is a bond between the mother and father that grows. Abram and Sarai didn't have that. The scenario they introduced forced uncomfortable relationships. Any hopes and dreams they started with were destroyed when Hagar flaunted her pregnancy in front of Sarai. **"When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress."** Sarai couldn't take the strain. Sarai had started this whole mess but now all she wanted was out. Sarai couldn't throw her servant out but she could make her feel awful. And Hagar ran away.

Hagar receives the first appearance of the angel of the Lord. This angel was no created angel. He speaks as God, he makes promises only God can make, and Hagar calls him God. This angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ, the second person of the Trinity. God himself came to Hagar first calling her to repentance. **“Go back to your mistress and submit to her.”** Second Hagar received a promise from the angel of the Lord. **“I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.”** The Lord would bless her family. And third the Lord promised he knew her son. **“You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery.”** Hagar could be comforted knowing that God was helping her when things were bad.

We don't just want God's help with the big problems. We like God's help in the small matters too. Why doesn't God just help me get good grades? He could make me smarter. He could stop that other boy from picking on me. I could really use God's help in this presentation. I want to do well. God knows if I do well my career will take off. I need help with my parents. They're driving me crazy with expectations. I can't be there all the time to help them out. I need some moments for myself too. In these situations if we perceive God is not helping us because we don't feel comforted by God might we think that he doesn't care. Might we think that God will never help us when we need him?

Twenty centuries after the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar that same preincarnate Christ became the incarnate Christ to a virgin in Bethlehem. It's clear that long before that birth the Savior was active in this world helping people. Jesus demonstrated love for the unloved, caring for those not cared for, and help for the helpless at all times during history. So we know that same Jesus cares for us. Paul prayed, **“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”** By his birth, at his death, through his resurrection we see Jesus takes action to help us. And even though we can't see God in the Scriptures we know we see God helping us through Jesus.

Whether you made it to midnight on New Year's Eve or not the year changed. You didn't have to be up for the 2011 to come. Just because we can't see Jesus doesn't mean he hasn't or won't do what he's promised. Jesus came without our being around and he did his work of saving us on the cross without our asking or helping. And he will keep his promises to forgive us and take us home to heaven even though we can't see him. Because when his promises are kept and he helps us we can see the one who sees us.