

**Series: This Is Our God**  
**“El Roi: The God Who Sees”**

**Genesis 16:1-16**

As we open God’s Word today, we are studying a very unique passage of Scripture with a very unique focus. Normally on the last Sunday of the year, we will have the morning message and include a brief “state of the church” address to discuss where we are and where we’re going. Usually that message focuses as a reminder of the mission of the church and our calling to be faithful in it, but today we’re going to address the state of the church in a unique way. While it is different than normal, I believe wholeheartedly it is what God wants us to do today.

In the Fall we were in a sermon series called “This Is Our God.” Throughout the study, we looked at the Old Testament compound names of God to discover how He has revealed Himself to man. With each name, there is something unique about His character and nature that He discloses to us. Throughout that study we only focused on one subset of God’s names - Yahweh or Jehovah. God has many additional names described throughout the Old Testament that do not begin with Jehovah but begin, instead, with El. When we went through our study, there were several of you who came up to me and asked me, “When we are going to study the name Jehovah Roi?” Sadly, that is not a name that we studied because it is actually not one of the “Jehovah” names of God, and it is also only referenced one time in all of the Bible. The actual name that they were referring to is the name “El Roi.” Please understand that when we say the name “El Roi” we are not describing my redneck cousin from Alabama. We are referring to the Old Testament name of God that He revealed to a most unlikely person, but in doing so, there is something profound that I believe He wants us to know. As we look to Genesis 16, I pray that in each of our lives and our life as a congregation, that we understand fully that the living God of heaven, our God, is the One who sees.

Show Text

I wish I could tell you that this story is a beautiful story with a picture-perfect ending. Like many of you, I like stories where all the pieces fit together, everything makes sense, and there is a happy, picturesque ending. However, the Bible includes countless stories much like the one that we’ve read today. It is messy and muddy, filled with brokenness, sin, hurt, guilt, shame, rivalry, pain, and just about every negative thing possible. Yet in the messiness of it all, God shows up in a personal, meaningful way to reveal something profound about Himself. To help us understand the significance of “The God Who Sees” it is helpful to get some background to the text.

Perhaps you remember the Old Testament saint, Abram, who later became known as Abraham. He was living in his father’s house when God called him to take his wife Sarah and go to a land of promise that God would reveal in the future. Abraham believed God’s word and left to find the place that God had assured him of. God greatly blessed Abraham and made a specific promise about his future. He told Abraham that he would make him the father of many nations. He would begin by giving him a son who would be an heir of the promise and through him, his descendants would be as many as the stars in heaven. God also assured Abraham that He would give his descendants this beautiful land of Canaan. In fact in **Genesis 15:18**, just before our text, the Scripture says, “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants

I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’ ” God’s promise to Abraham was the promise of blessing, the promise of security, the promise of land, and the promise of a son, and Abraham believed all of this. In fact, **Genesis 15:6** says, “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Abraham had heard the promise from God, believed it, and acted in faith. It is here where we pick up the story today.

Ten years have now passed as we come to Genesis 16. God had promised a son, but He did not promise when the son would arrive. God had promised a multitude of descendants, but now as ten years have passed it seems highly unlikely to ever happen. Abraham and Sarah were in **a very difficult season of waiting**. I believe it’s important to park here for a moment to remind us that waiting on the Lord is vitally important. God not only knows what He wants to do, but He has a perfect timetable for all that He will do. He had promised that He would bless them with a child, but now they were being forced to wait on the Lord and trust in Him. Most people though, don’t want to wait. This lack of waiting is usually evidence of a lack of trust in the Lord. **Isaiah 28:16b (NKJV)** says, “Whoever believes will not act hastily.” We should always act quickly when it comes to obedience, but when it comes to faith we often have to wait until the Lord’s timing is right. Usually, our hasty actions are the result of distrusting God, which then ends up leading us in the wrong direction. This is entirely true of Abraham and Sarah. Their unwillingness to wait on God’s fulfillment leads to Sarah scheming up her own plan, and anytime we second guess God’s plan and begin to lean our own, it is a dangerous thing. True wisdom is not found in the wisdom of man but in the Word and will of God. **Warren Wiersbe** said it best, “Faith is living without scheming.” Sarah was leaning on her own understanding when she contrived the plan. Since God had not opened her womb to have a child, and she was now getting much older and certainly impatient, then maybe a surrogate mother would be the way to go. It was common in that day to have servants, and she had an Egyptian handmaiden by the name of Hagar. Because she was under Sarah’s authority, the girl would have to do whatever was required of her. I’m not suggesting that this was right or appropriate, but simply what was allowed in that culture at that time. Sarah’s logical conclusion was that she could give her servant to Abraham to be his second wife, again another common thing in that day. Once this new marriage was consummated, she would likely become pregnant and then this would be a way in which God could fulfill His covenant with Abraham and eventually bring many descendants into the world. Clearly, Sarah is acting foolishly and trying to play the role of God. Sadly, Abraham didn’t do any better because he passively went along with the whole stupid plan. They apparently thought, “What could possibly go wrong?” They thought this was a foolproof plan. Neither of them stopped to consider God’s heart on the matter or the feelings and thoughts of Hagar. Frankly, it appears that both of them were acting selfishly and sinfully. As messy as this was, it was about to get worse.

They hastily went forward with their plan. Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to be his wife, the marriage was consummated, and just as planned she conceived and was with child. Everything seemed to be going well when all of a sudden it wasn’t. Remember, sin always gives you everything it promised and more than you ever bargained for. **Verse 5** tells us that when Hagar conceived, she began to despise Sarah. We can think of a million reasons why that would have been the case. After all, Hagar didn’t have a say in the whole situation. Sarah treated Hagar as if she was a pawn instead of a real person. Abraham willingly obliged, and now Hagar is pregnant with a child from a man who doesn’t really love her. There are surely many reasons why she would have despised her, but the specific word used in this text indicates that her despising was actually

from Hagar's own heart of pride. As a servant to Sarah for many years, she had seen first-hand the pain and anguish of being without child. And now after her experience with Abraham, Hagar immediately becomes pregnant. The word for despise here literally means "to look down upon, to disdain." It is interesting to note that **Proverbs 30:23** describes one of the examples of unexpected pride saying that the earth quakes, "Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress." This describes Hagar well. Needless to say, this whole situation is a mess. Abraham and Sarah have been impatient with God, Sarah has schemed up her own plan, Abraham has passively gone along with it, and now Hagar is filled with pride and looking down on Sarah. The whole situation leads to all-out conflict. Sarah pulls Abraham aside and says, "May the wrong that is done to me be upon you. It's your fault. I gave her to you to be your wife, but now that she's conceived, she thinks she's better than me and she hates me. May the Lord judge between us who's the guilty party." It's amazing how quickly Sarah had forgotten that the whole thing was her idea. Again, being passive and abdicating his role as a spiritual leader, Abraham said, "What? This wasn't my idea. She's your servant. You do what you think is best." And in true form, having just blamed Abraham, Sarah now turns against Hagar and begins to treat her harshly, and Hagar, instead of confronting the issues, runs away.

Maybe you're sitting there thinking, "Wow! That's a doozy!" You'd be correct. I told you it was messy. It sounds more like a scene from a Jerry Springer episode or some tabloid that you would read from Hollywood than it does the backdrop for something incredible that God would reveal. But if Christmas teaches us anything, it is the fact that God did not ignore the brokenness and messiness of humanity. The messiness of the stable floor and the brokenness of the stoney manger reveal that God intentionally entered our messy and broken world so that He might reveal Himself and provide a way for our redemption. Into this mess, God spoke a direct word of comfort and calling to Hagar, but this word from God should also bring us a sense of comfort and calling today.

As we study the text, we see emphatically that He is the God who sees. This fact should not surprise us. The Bible tells us that He is omniscient, knowing all things. It also tells us that He is omnipresent, in all places at all times. **Proverbs 15:3** says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." There is nothing that escapes His notice. He knows and sees it all. As the angel of the Lord visits Hagar, he reveals three things that God sees.

## **I. God Sees Where You've Been**

As soon as the angel of the Lord appears to Hagar he asks a question, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" It is important to understand that this question is not asked to seek information. As the text unfolds it is clear that the angel of the Lord knows exactly what is going on and what is to come in the future. Like a wise counselor will do, there's a strategic reason for the question. It caused Hagar to examine what was going on, accept the reality of the situation, and to even identify the part that she played in it. Certain realities of life can be very painful, but it is impossible to overcome them without facing them. This simple question encouraged Hagar to take an honest look at what had taken place and admit where things were. The fact that God had seen where she had been reveals that there are two specific facts God already knew:

### **A. He Knows What's Been Done**

God was fully aware of the selfish plan that Sarah had contrived, and He was fully aware that Abraham had gone along with it. God was also fully aware of the rivalry that now happened between the two women. God had heard every harmful word that Sarah had spoken against Hagar. God had seen every piercing glance and every raised eyebrow. God had identified the tone in Sarah's voice every time she spoke to Hagar. God had, in fact, even seen the thoughts in Sarah's mind and the motives of her heart. There are times that we may do something and think that we have gotten away with it, and even conclude that if no one has seen us or heard us, then our secret is safe. We may act like a child, looking this way and that way to see if the coast is clear while refusing to look up and acknowledge the fact that nothing escapes God's notice. He sees it and knows it all, and Jesus reminds us that we will give an account of our actions, especially the words we have used. He said in **Matthew 12:36**, "But I tell you that every careless (idle) word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment." I don't think that Hagar understood all of this, but in the moment, the angel's words were likely a great comfort – God knew her situation. He knew the harm that had taken place against her, He saw her where she was, and He was aware of the words that had been spoken harshly against her.

## **B. He Knows What We've Done**

**Hebrews 4:13** says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." The fact that God knew all that had been done also meant, however, that God knew what she had done. It has often been said that "hurt people hurt people." Maybe another way to say this is, "People who have been sinned against often sin against others." While there were certainly many things that had been done against her, it was Hagar's pride that led her to look down upon Sarah. This did not justify or condone Sarah's harsh treatment towards her, but it was important for Hagar to recognize what she contributed to the situation. Furthermore, instead of addressing the situation, she handled it in an unhealthy manner. In fact, I would say this was par for the course in this whole story. When conflict came, and it inevitably comes every time sin is involved, Sarah blamed Abraham and tried to wipe her hands of her own guilty actions. Abraham responded by abdicating his spiritual headship in the home and leaving the responsibility on Sarah's shoulders. Then, Hagar responded to the whole thing by running away, including taking responsibility for her own attitude and actions. Please understand clearly that there may be some times in your life when you need to flee for your safety, but in this case, Hagar was just tired of the drama surrounding Sarah and wanted to be done with her. It is precisely then that the angel of the Lord shows up in this exact moment to assure her that He knows where she's been. He did not rebuke her strongly, and he wasn't harsh, but he clearly spoke into her situation and called her to change course, which leads to a second reality...

## **II. God Sees Where You Are**

Knowing that God knows where we are is a profound thought. He not only knows where we've been and what we have faced, but He also knows where we are at and every aspect of what we are feeling and facing today. David stated this eloquently in **Psalms 139:1-6** saying, "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.

You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.” David understood clearly that God knows where we are and what we are thinking and feeling at any given moment, and Hagar was about to come to the same realization. God's knowledge of where we are was indicated in two ways:

#### **A. His Insight**

The angel of the Lord knew exactly where to find Hagar because he was sent by God. He knew the exact wilderness and spring to find her. Additionally, he already knew what was going on in her life. **Verse 11** tells us that the Lord had given heed to her affliction. This suggests to us that she had likely been praying and God had been hearing. She did not take for granted that there is a God in heaven who knew the facts of her life, but she was willing to pray in hopes that He would take note of her. Furthermore, God knew that she was pregnant. Of course, this is not surprising because He is the giver of life. God is the one who opens and closes the womb. None of this had escaped His awareness. He had clear insight to everything that was going on. This does not mean that all of this had transpired according to His will, but it does mean that God was aware of it all, and even through the painful and selfish things, God would still overrule to accomplish His plans and purposes.

This serves as a powerful reminder today that God knows where you are. He not only knows what you are dealing with in your life, but He has insight into what is taking place and how He will work through it for His glory. Unfortunately, many of us get impatient like Sarah and go to our own plans, but we will not do so without harm to ourselves and others. Instead of rushing ahead with our plans, we need to learn to sit still before the Lord until we know that He has given insight.

#### **B. His Instruction**

Knowing all things, the angel of the Lord now gives a word of instruction, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.” At first glance, it seems that this is harsh. Sarah had been treating her poorly and now God is instructing her to go back. This flies in the face of the message of our culture that says, “God wants you to be happy.” The reality is that God wants you to be holy, and you will experience fulfillment when you know that you have lived a life of obedience to Him. There is happiness that comes in the fulfillment of knowing that our lives have honored God.

Please be careful in this moment to not misinterpret Scripture. Due to the cultural issues of our day, many people would misread this statement. Please understand that God is not calling Hagar to return to a physically abusive marriage. Abraham was not the source of her hurt or harm. Sarah's ill treatment towards her was likely verbal and emotional and was connected to Hagar's contempt and scorn towards her. This is why the angel of the Lord not only told her to return to Sarah but to also submit to her. This meant that Hagar had to humble herself before Sarah. I can only imagine how difficult this must have been, but it is not very difficult to imagine when we consider that God requires the same of us as we follow Him. We can't go our own way and go with God at the same time. We have to humble ourselves before Him, trust His will, and follow His plan. It really isn't about what we want, what we think, what we

feel. Our lives should be about the Lord, His Word, and His will above anything and everything else. In **Luke 9:23b-24**, Jesus was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” It has always been interesting to me that before that statement Jesus actually describes how He had to suffer many things and be crucified. He willingly lay down His life not according to His own desire, but the will of the Father.

Because our lives should be submitted to and surrendered to Him, we must be careful to know the personal instruction that He has for us. This specific instruction in Genesis 16 was for Hagar, but she has now died and has been gone for many years. Today, God is still speaking and giving words of instruction to His people. He speaks through His Word, through the Holy Spirit, through the church, and through circumstances. Jesus reminded of this in John 14 through 16 as He assured us of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We cannot read those chapters without recognizing the truth of God's Word and how the Holy Spirit would impart His will to us. It comes to a climactic moment in **John 16:12-14**, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.” Our instruction may be very different than the instruction that Hagar received, but we must be clear that God knows where we are, and He is willing and ready to instruct us if we are truly willing to seek Him and surrender to His will.

### **III. God Sees Where You're Going**

Because God is omniscient, knowing all things, He knows the end from the beginning. In my time with the Lord this week I've been reading through the book of Revelation. You cannot read that book without understanding that everything is in His hands. He knows what is to come in our lives and the plans and purposes He will accomplish through them, and He knows what is to come in the world itself. When we consider His greatness, like David in **Psalms 8:4** we cry out, “What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” Almighty God is above all things, yet in His grace and mercy He cares for each of us. We see that in his interactions with Hagar.

#### **A. The Future Revealed**

Hagar did not know all that God would do in the future. She had seen Abraham worship and had learned about his God. Surely she had heard Abraham and Sarah discuss God's promise about a son, but the whole situation was very complicated because of sin. With all the conflict at hand, Hagar had many questions about her own life and the life of her unborn child. It was here in her time of uncertainty that God speaks and says first, “Don't worry about your son. He will be fine. In fact, I will multiply your descendants through him. Your descendants will be so many that there will be too many to count.” Second, you should name the child “Ishmael,” because I've given heed to your affliction. What a wonderful word of comfort to a woman facing many questions. She has received the promise that her child will be fine and that through him there will be many peoples. She has also been instructed how to name him, a constant reminder that God had heard her prayer. Not all of the future, though, was glamorous. True to

the conflict she currently faced, his life would continually be one of conflict. Without a full history lesson today, we know that this is true. The Arab-Israeli conflict that still exists today find its roots right here. Not only was this a historical conflict, but Galatians 4 depicts this as a theological conflict that ensues as well. For now, though, it is important for us to see that God gave her a glimpse of the future and words of promise about the wellbeing of her child.

It is important to recognize that God does not always give us every detail of the future, but He has given us enough of the future to be able to understand and live accordingly. As we seek Him and His direction in our life He leads us to the next step, but make no mistake about it, the primary emphasis here is not the future that is revealed but the faith that is required.

## **B.     The Faith Required**

It required much faith on Hagar's part to return to Sarah. She knew that she'd been treated harshly and feared that she would experience the same again. Logically, it would not make sense for her to go back there, but the angel of the Lord had given her clear instruction. She now had to determine to go her own path or go God's path. Would she keep running with her plan or would she trust God's plan? It appears from the text that there really wasn't much of a choice to make. She was so amazed at God's mercy and compassion to meet her in that place that there was truly only one choice to make. This became a powerful moment in her life that she would look back on for years to come. Her encounter with God was so real that she called God, "El Roi" - the God who sees. She even named the well located there "Beer-lahai-roi," which means "the well of the one who sees me." As soon as the encounter with the angel was over, she returned to Sarah and bore Abraham a son, who in obedience to God's will, named him Ishmael.

It is interesting to know that God was gracious and merciful to everyone involved. There is no mention of further conflict or harsh treatment for at least 13 years, and even when further circumstance arose, God moved to fulfill His plan. This serves as a powerful reminder to us today that He is still the God who sees. He knows where we've been, He knows where we are, and He knows where He is leading us. As you consider where you've been, is there anything today that you need to confess to God and turn from? Is there anything today where you need His comfort and healing? As you consider where you are today, is there any word of counsel or instruction that you need from the Lord? Is there any insight that you need the Holy Spirit to give you? As you consider the future that He is leading you to, are you taking up your cross and following Him or are you pursuing your own plans? Are you seeking His will or your own? Are you living by faith or are you living by fear? I don't know how God is speaking to you today, but I do know that the God who sees, sees you and He wants you to know Him and grow closer to Him today!