

Session 5

November 14, 2021

CONFIDENCE AFTER WE FAIL

Genesis 16:1-5; 17:1-9

I often tell my students that there is really only one sin: *pride*.

It was pride that got Lucifer kicked out of heaven (see Is. 14:12ff) and got Adam and Eve kicked out of Eden (see Gen. 3). And it's the same sin we wrestle with every day. Simply put, we want to be God! We want to do things *our* way.

After years of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, Abraham and Sarah decided to step out on their own and do things *their* way. Predictably, the result was disastrous. Three key words help frame the story.

Conspire (16:1-4). The most casual reading indicates that Sarah was the brainchild who offered her maid to Abraham (v. 2). But it was likely Abraham's depression and subsequent complaints over the couple's barrenness that triggered the idea. The servant Hagar had likely been with the family for ten years, probably acquired during the couple's detour into (and quickly out of) Egypt (v. 3). The idea seemed reasonable at first. The couple were aged 75 and 85, and the possibility of having children was long gone. Besides this, as the servant of Sarah, Hagar was considered her personal property. Any children born to the servant (especially if fathered by her husband) would also be considered hers. Hence, a family, fathered by Abraham at least, would begin. Once again, there is no guidance sought from God, no attempt at caution. Sarah offered her maid and Abraham took her up on it. They decided to do things *their* way. For reflection: *Did Sarah have the right to offer her servant to her husband? Why would she do such a thing? What moral implications does this decision bring up?*

Contempt (16:4-6). What seemed like a reasonable plan led to the planned result: a pregnancy. But you can only imagine the anguish and bitterness that resulted among the people involved. This was no business deal...this was a family being torn apart by poor judgment, short-sighted selfishness, and an immoral relationship! Just as soon as Hagar realized she was pregnant, she attempted to turn the tables on Sarah. The words *with contempt* (vv. 4, 5) can mean anything from *slighting*, to *cursing*, to *humiliating to the point of quivering*. No other details are given, but the word is in the emphatic position. One could only imagine the haughty attitude and bitter derision Hagar aimed at her barren mistress. Sarah's reaction—as predictable as everything else in this story—was to attack her husband! In verse 5 she argued that she was doing Abraham a favor and *he* was allowing it to backfire on *her*! Her final statement is harsh. "May the Lord judge between me and you" is an appeal for God to step in, no doubt in order to vindicate her while condemning him. At this, Abraham threw up his hands and turned the whole sordid mess back to Sarah. While Hagar was offered as a *wife* back in verse 3, it didn't take long for her status to drop back to a *servant* in verse 6. Sarah's subsequent brutality against Hagar was enough to drive her out of the household. For reflection: *Do some research and see what eventually happened to Hagar and Ishmael. In what ways are Jews and Christians still paying for this sin?*

Continuation (17:1-9). Another 10 years or so passed. I can only imagine the family dynamics at this point! Yet God remained faithful to His promise, even when Abraham stumbled in his commitment. While much of the original covenant is reviewed in these verses, the emphasis seems to be on two areas. First, is Abraham's *fruitfulness*. His descendants will be multiplied (v. 2); nations and many nations will result (vv. 4, 6); and future offspring and future generations are mentioned (vv. 7, 8). The second emphasis is on *faithfulness*. Abraham is to live a blameless life (v. 1), and the promises made to him would extend to his descendants. But they too, were expected to *keep His covenant* (v. 9). For reflection: *In light of Abraham's pride in chapter 16, what is the significance of changing his name from Abram to Abraham in chapter 17?*