

# The Cost of Compromise

## Genesis 16:1-16



### THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

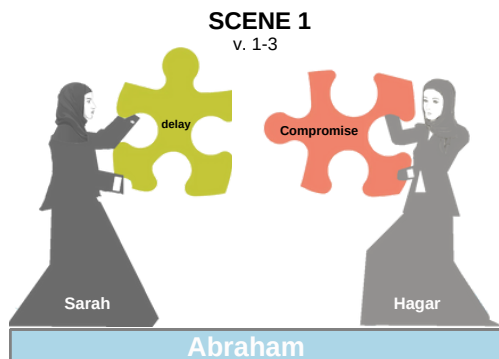


### SERMON OUTLINE

Compromise is often necessary in human relationships and decision-making processes. However, compromising on God's plans and purposes is not acceptable and can lead to costly consequences. The story of Hagar in Genesis 16 demonstrates the danger of compromising on God's ways for the sake of expediency or personal preference. The passage also highlights how God responds to those who compromise and offers a better alternative to relying on human schemes and shortcuts. The two scenes in this passage detail the compromise and its cost, as well as the grace that can be found when compromisers turn to God's ways.

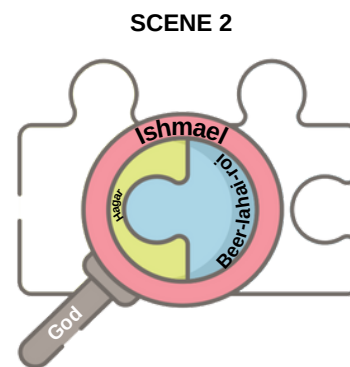


When it comes to God's plans, His purposes, His ways, compromise is never okay. When we decide we know better, that we'll do things on our terms, and compromise in regard to God's plans and ways, not only is it not okay, it's costly.



#### Compromise and its Cost

- o Gen 15 speaks of offspring, blessing, and inheriting the land of Canaan. Instead of a birth announcement, Gen 16 starts out with something else: delay.
- o In vv. 1-3, 10 years have passed, and Sarah compromises by enacting her own version of the plan. Hagar, Sarah's servant, is put forward as a surrogate mother and Sarah invites Abraham to take her as a wife to be Abraham a son.
  - Culturally, this practice was accepted, but it deviates from God's intention for marriage between one man and one woman as shown in Genesis 2:23-25.
- o There are links between Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 16 and Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.
  - Just as Adam was silent, so too, Abraham sounds no objections.
  - Just as Eve "took" the fruit of the tree, and "gave" some to her husband (Gen 3:6), so too, Sara "took" Hagar and "gave" her to Abram.
  - Just as Adam took and ate, so too, Abraham indulges.
- o Hagar is initially treated wrongly through this compromise, but in verse 4, Sarah becomes another victim of the fallout from the compromise. After becoming pregnant by Abraham, Hagar looks with contempt upon Sarah.
- o Sarah responds by further wronging Hagar, treating her harshly, causing Hagar to flee.



#### The Compromisers are met by Grace

- o The chaos and conflict caused by compromise is not the end of the story. In verse 7, the angel of the LORD finds Hagar at spring on the way to Shur.
- o Verse 13 speaks of the messenger/angel as the LORD himself. Some interpreters have equated this "messenger" with Jesus. This is a possibility.
- o Three names are significant in this portion of the passage:
  - Ishmael means "God hears"
  - Hagar names God "you are a God of seeing"
  - The well is named Beer-lahai-roi which means "the well of the Living one who sees me"
- o In the midst of compromise God does not push us out, but he desires to come to us. God hears us. God sees us.

# The Cost of Compromise

## Genesis 16:1-16



### SERMON OUTLINE

#### Three common leverage points for deception that lead to compromise:



**Expediency** – Sarah and Abraham are not totally deviating from God's plan. The basic plan is still intact: many nations through Abraham's heir. And yet, in their desire to speed up the process, they take matters into their own hands. Whenever we do this, it never, ever works.



**Lawfulness** – Abraham and Sarah were not breaking with cultural customs in their surrogate pregnancy from taking Hagar as a second wife. And yet, in breaking with biblical mandate for marriage as between one man and one woman, they're technically legal and culturally acceptable 'lawful' behavior ("It's our right to behave this way!" or "It's the custom of the whole culture"), they bring calamity and sin upon their house.



**It works!** – Their plan does yield a son. It works (at least in the short term), but the message of Genesis 16 is that it never works in the larger context if it deviates from or tries to improve upon God's plan.

“The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some areas in which the leverage points for compromise (expediency, cultural acceptance/lawfulness, pragmatism [it works!]) in our contemporary society and in your personal experience?
- What is the cost of compromise for Christians in their contemporary context? What might the implications and results of compromise lead to when they eventuate into sinful acts?
- How might the name given to God by Hagar in Genesis 16 “you are a God of seeing,” the name Ishmael (“God hears”) and the name of the well (“the well of the Living one who sees me”) assist us to forsake compromise and lean into faithfulness even during difficult times? In what ways does God's presence (the God who hears and sees me) function as a grace to both comfort inadvertent or repentant compromisers (us) in affliction and also restrain us from further compromise?
- Two examples of the enduring harmful, unjust, sinful effects of compromise wreak havoc on cultures and societies: slavery and sexual immorality. How does individual compromise contributive to collective degradation within a culture? How can we connect the God who meets compromisers in grace to a culture so caught up in its sinful webs?
- How might you answer the frequent claim against the Bible's authority: “Well, the Bible evidences all sorts of different marriage arrangements, including polygamy (in Genesis 16 and elsewhere). Therefore, we can have changes in the way we think of marriage in the present day? Is there a difference between what the Bible describes and what it prescribes? (Hint: Genesis 2)



#### Further Study

- “Sarah had a right to do this under the laws and customs of the time.” James Boice, Genesis: Volume 2, 569.
- See Gen 20:1; 25:18; Ex. 15:22
- James Boice, Genesis 12-36, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 573.
- John Calvin, Genesis, 430, writes,
  - “We are here taught with what clemency the Lord acts towards his own people, although they have deserved severe punishment.... Now he casts a paternal look upon Hagar so his favor extends to the whole family.
- The woman at the well, John 4:1-42
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/genesis/>