

GENESIS 20 – ABRAHAM LIES AGAIN

A. Abraham's lie, God's protection.

1. (1-2) Abraham lies again, in a similar manner as before.

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

a. **Abraham journeyed from there to the South:** After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved. Perhaps he did not want to live in the hills overlooking the destroyed region any longer, and be reminded of those people and the judgment that came upon them.

b. **Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister":** Abraham's concern was probably not because Sarah looked like a young beauty at 90 years of age. We can surmise that she was reasonably attractive at that age, but more importantly she was connected to one of the richest and most influential men of the region. In that day, a harem was sometimes more of a political statement than a romantic statement.

i. At the same time, we should not ignore the idea of Sarah's continued attractiveness even in old age. "She had in some measure been physically rejuvenated, in order to conceive, bear, and nurse Isaac, and possibly this manifested itself in renewed beauty as well" (Morris).

c. **She is my sister:** This is the same lie Abraham told back in [Genesis 12:10-13](#). He showed that it was easy to slip back into sinful habits. Abraham stumbled in a place that he had stumbled before. Instead of trusting God to keep his family together, he devised his own plan to do it. His plan would fail completely.

i. Age does not automatically sanctify us. Unless yielded to the Spirit of God, we will repeat in our old age the sinful patterns of our youth.

2. (3-7) God threatens judgment upon Abimelech for taking Sarah.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this." And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

a. **Indeed you are a dead man:** This was a scary thing to hear from God, even in a dream. But the point had to be made to Abimelech, even though he could truly say he acted **in the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands**.

i. This may seem drastic, but something important was concerned. “Suppose Abimelech had taken Sarah and God had not intervened? Two seeds would have been at the door to Sarah’s womb, and to this day an element of doubt would cling to the ancestry of our Lord” (Barnhouse).

b. I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart: Because Abimelech’s **heart** was right in this regard, God kept him from worse sin. God’s protecting power can guide even a pagan king ([Proverbs 21:1](#)).

i. Despite Abraham’s failure to really trust God in the situation, God did not abandon him. He would not *let* Abimelech touch Sarah. Her womb was going to bring forth the son of promise, who would eventually bring forth God’s Messiah. God would not leave this matter up to man.

c. **For he is a prophet, and he will pray for you:** Even though Abraham was in sin, he was still **a prophet** and man of powerful prayer. God’s mercy did not leave Abraham, even though Abraham didn’t trust God the way he should.

B. Abraham is rebuked again.

1. (8-10) **Abraham once again suffers rebuke from a heathen king.**

So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?”

a. **You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done:** It is sad to see that Abimelech – the pagan king – was in the right, and Abraham – the man of God – was in the wrong, and Abimelech told Abraham so.

b. **What did you have in view, that you have done this thing:** This was a logical question for Abimelech to ask Abraham. Abraham certainly did not have the **LORD in view** when he lied and failed to trust God.

2. (11-13) **Abraham’s excuse.**

And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He *is* my brother.’”

a. **Surely the fear of God is not in this place:** This was Abraham’s excuse for his sinful deception, but the real problem was that the **fear of God** wasn’t in Abraham. If he really respected the LORD, His commandments, His promises, and His protection, then Abraham would have never trusted in his *own* efforts to keep his family safe and together.

b. **Indeed she is truly my sister:** This was another attempt to justify his lie, by saying it was really the truth. But a half-truth, said with intent to deceive, is always a whole lie.

c. **When God called me to wander from my father's house:** This was an indirect way of blaming God for the problem. Abraham claimed that God sent him out on this dangerous journey upon which Abraham had to protect himself.

i. "There is a terrible meaning in this verb *wander* which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used of animals going astray, of a drunken man reeling, or staggering, of sinful seduction, of a prophet's lies causing the people to err, of the path of a lying heart. Six other words are translated *wander*, any one of which Abraham might have used, but he used the worst word available." (Barnhouse)

ii. "Abraham should have said: 'Forgive me, Abimelech, for dishonoring both you and my God. My selfish cowardice overwhelmed me, and I denied my God by fearing that He who called me could not take care of me. He is not as your gods of wood and stone. He is the God of glory. He is the living God, the Creator, the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. He told me He would be my shield and my exceeding great reward, and supplier of all my needs... In sinning against Him, I sinned against you. Forgive me, Abimelech.'" (Barnhouse)

3. (14-18) **Abimelech's gift recompenses Sarah, and Abraham prays for him.**

Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was reproved. So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

a. **Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham:** In showing such generosity to Abraham, Abimelech was essentially heaping coals of fire on Abraham's head (as in [Romans 12:20](#)). This was somewhat backwards; Abraham should have given gifts to Abimelech because Abraham was in the wrong.

i. Also, it is interesting to see that Abraham *accepted* these gifts when he had refused gifts from a pagan king previously ([Genesis 14:21-24](#)), because he wanted no one to think a man had made him rich. Here, because of Abraham's compromise, he found it hard to reclaim the same high moral ground.

b. **I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver:** We can imagine the irony in Abimelech's voice when he referred to Abraham as Sarah's **brother**.

c. **Thus she was reproved:** The ancient Hebrew word for **reproved** is *yakach*. It has the idea of "set right," so it is debatable if Sarah was *set right* by Abimelech's rebuke, or if she was *found to be right* because of her humble submission in this occasion. In a sense, both were true.