



ABRAHAM STUDY GUIDE

**A 10 WEEK DEEP DIVE INTO THE
LIFE & WALK OF ABRAHAM**

PART 07

This booklet has been printed in-house at Emergence Church.
Typefaces used with licensure: Gotham HTF & Surveyor.

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

For questions regarding content and usage of this booklet please email:
info@emergencenj.org



FEAR

GENESIS 20

DÉJÀ VU

Back in Lesson One, we saw how Abraham fled to Egypt during a famine. There, he sought to protect himself by presenting his wife as his sister, so he would not be killed by other men seeking to marry her. Sure enough, she was taken, not just into any household, but into the harem of Pharaoh. This didn't end particularly well for Abraham. God afflicted Pharaoh's household with a plague, and when he found out it was because of Abraham's lie, he booted him from Egypt.

Now, in chapter 20, we find an account that is strikingly similar. But this time, there's no famine, and he's not in Egypt. Abraham is just migrating his flocks anywhere there's grass for them to graze. He ends up in the Negev (southern Palestine), and sojourns by the city of Gerar. For the same reason as before, he tells everyone that Sarah is his sister. As before, this is a problem both because of the vulnerable situation this put Sarah in as well as the fact that, in all this, Abraham was not trusting God to take care of him, and resorts instead to deception.

What is truly shocking this time around is what comes out in his confession in Genesis 20:13, when attempting to justify his actions, he confesses,

“When God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do to me: at every place to which we come, say of me, “He is my brother.”’” Every place! Every time they came in contact with the people who lived in the land of Canaan, Abraham would say that Sarah was his sister, and he made her say it too.

This was a serious moral failure. Out of fear, he lied and he made his wife lie, and worst of all, he placed her in a vulnerable position. Though old in age, she clearly was a woman of impressive wealth, which would have made her an attractive prospect to powerful men looking to increase their own possessions.

In the face of such realities, Abraham feared man, not God. What does it mean that God would use such a flawed man as the one through whom he would bless the world? Does it mean that God doesn’t care about our conduct?

Hardly. God consistently challenges Abraham to live a life of righteousness and integrity. For example, in chapter 18, when he is about to inform Abraham of his plans to deal with Sodom, he says, of Abraham, “I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”^[1] Just as today, God had standards he expected his people to live by. At times, they walked in faithfulness, but often they stumbled. And all along, they are upheld as God’s own, because it is by faith that they are counted righteous in his eyes.^[2]

It is precisely this that makes Abraham such a good example of a man of faith. If his walk with God was simply a steady, consistent uphill climb towards perfect obedience and growth in holiness, he would be no help for us at all, because we are nothing like that. The Christian life is not one of uninhibited steady progress, but rather a rollercoaster that loops around and around, up, down, and in all other conceivable directions. Over time, there is maturity, growth, and progress in becoming more like Christ. But that progress is never without struggle, and a daily need to put to death what remains in us of our old, sinful nature.^[3] We see ourselves in Abraham, not despite his moral shortcomings, but precisely because of them.

A RISKY GAMBLE

Although Abraham’s practice of protecting himself by presenting Sarah as his sister has landed him in hot water in the past, there is an added recklessness to his actions here in chapter 20. This is because chapters 17 and 18 have explicitly incorporated Sarah into the promise as well.^[4] Abraham

knows that the heir of the covenant will not come only from his body, but also from hers. Having seen the disastrous way in which his plan backfired twenty-five years earlier in Egypt, one would think this would have made him a bit more cautious about putting the mother of the promised offspring in danger of being swept up into a foreign ruler's arms. Additionally, if the sequence of events in the narrative of Genesis is any indicator, Abraham and Sarah do not conceive an heir until the beginning of chapter 21. And yet, when confronted by the Philistine king Abimelech about his deception, Abraham tells him he lied about his wife because he was afraid he would be killed. Does he not trust God to keep him alive at least long enough to fulfill his covenantal promise to him?

Another aspect of the wife/sister scandal that was present during Abraham's sojourn in Egypt that is amplified in his encounter with the Philistines of chapter 20 is how Abraham's deceitful methods compromise his witness to the unbelieving nations. In neither episode does he attempt to intervene after Sarah is taken, nor is the truth revealed because Abraham's guilt led him to repentance and confession. Rather, the foreigners discover his deception through other means. While chapter 12 is ambiguous about this, chapter 20 provides more details. Here, it is revealed directly to Abimelech by God in a dream, and when confronted about it, Abraham discloses his reasons: "There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."^[5] In reality, however, it is Abimelech, the "pagan," who fears God. Abraham is the one who is acting faithlessly.

Abraham even attempts to lessen the seriousness of his lie with a technicality: "Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother."^[6] While such close kinship marriages were not unheard of in his day, especially in societies that traced descent through only one parent (in this case, the father), it is also irrelevant; it isn't whether or not (or to what extent) Sarah is his sister that matters, but rather that they're married!

Because he caved to his fears, the one who is to bring blessing to all the families of the earth has now once again brought a curse, and now he's reduced to grasping at straws to dig himself out of the hole he's fallen into.

RESOLUTION

The story's resolution continues to portray Abimelech as a man of upright character. As he reunites Sarah with Abraham, he presents the family with gifts of livestock and servants, allows them to dwell in his land, and gives them a large amount of silver as a "sign" of her innocence.^[7] God gra-

ciously allows Abraham to retain his position as the channel of blessing by hearing his prayers on behalf of Abimelech, whose household is healed of the affliction that God had brought upon them in order to make him aware of Sarah's status as a married woman.

God has protected the chosen family, despite their shortcomings. The seriousness of Abraham's actions is neither minimized nor explained away. Once again, we see clearly that it is not because of any heroism or greatness in Abraham that God's blessing is given to the world. Rather, as with us, God graciously allows Abraham to participate in his magnificent plan to bring the ultimate blessing to the world through Christ, the offspring of the woman, the offspring of Abraham.

[1] Genesis 18:19; see also 17:1.

[2] Genesis 15:6.

[3] Romans 6:12-14; 8:13; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:5.

[4] Genesis 17:15-21; 18:9-15.

[5] Genesis 20:11.

[6] Genesis 20:12. Relations between half-siblings are prohibited in Leviticus 18:9, 11; 20:17; Deuteronomy 27:22; Ezekiel 22:11.

[7] Literally a "covering of the eyes" (ke ût ênayim).

QUESTIONS:

Use time this week to thoughtfully answer these questions. Take time to reflect, pray and ask the Lord to be a part of this process.

1. In this chapter, it becomes evident that passing his wife as his sister was not something that happened just once (in Egypt, 12:10-20) or even twice (here by Gerar). Rather, it was something he did regularly. In what areas do you struggle with habitual unfaithfulness?

[illegible]

2. Abraham acted in this way because he was afraid that God would not take care of him. How is your walk of faith inhibited by similar fears?

[illegible]

QUESTIONS:

3. We also see here how Abraham’s questionable actions compromise his ability to be a blessing (12:1–3), and instead bring trouble on unsuspecting people and disrepute on himself. Whether we like it or not, our actions before an unbelieving world reflect on what they think of our God. How do you need to be a better example and witness to those who do not know Christ?

4. When was a time that God rescued you from the consequences of your own faithlessness?

5. How does God show amazing love to you, even when you clearly don't deserve it?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

NOTES

Use this space to make notes during the sermon or jot down prayer requests or anything important.

[illegible]





LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE
