



Genesis – 20:1 -21:7  
Abraham Stumbles, God is Rock Steady!  
(Lesson #29)

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*20:1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife.” 4 Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? 5 Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” 6 Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”*

**Vs 1** - From there is a little clumsy, since we are actually coming off a discussion about Lot and not Abraham. But I think we get the point, Abraham, who has lived in the area of Hebron, in the Oaks of Mamre (his Amorite colleague) now journeys from Hebron into the area of the Negeb, and he moved his tent to an area between Kadesh and Shur into an area known as Gerar.

Gerar was an ancient city of the Philistines.

We are not provided with any reason for the relocation. Equally, Abraham would likely be fairly unknown in this new region and it is likely that people did not know him.

Keep in mind, he is a wealthy and powerful man who is now sojourning in Gerar.

**Vs 2** - Then, here in Gerar, shortly after the events of Genesis 17 and 18, Abraham looks at Sarah his wife and says: “she is my wife.” It is likely what he is telling the locals, at least when they ask, is Sarah is his sister.

This continues long enough, that Abimelech, the king of Gerar sent and took Sarah, and brought her into his haram, no doubt planning to ultimately marry her and consummate the marriage.

Now as we think about this what is shocking is Sarah is at least 89 years old.

She is no spring chicken, but she is obviously a beautiful woman with a very youthful appearance.

**It is possible that Abimelech takes this as a political maneuver. We do not know.**

The reason I doubt that understanding of these verses, is Abraham’s desire to tell everyone “*she is my sister*”, highlights that he understands that she is beautiful.

As we have discussed Sarah really is Abraham’s brother. But she is also his wife!

**Now is this a problem?** God has promised that it would be through the union of Abraham and Sarah, God intends to bless the nations.

I hope you see that Abraham's folly, his lack of faith, has put in jeopardy (at least from a human perspective) God's plan to bring forth the singular seed who will bless the nations.

**Another Issue:** This is a very similar repeat of the same old sin from Genesis 12. There it was a little easier to understand, they were new in walking with God.

But here, after 25 years, repeating this same old sin. After all of God's faithfulness over these years. After all of these amazing revelations?

**One more point before we leave:** Abimelech means "**my father is king**", this is likely not a name, but a title.

We will see in chapter 26 that Isaac goes to the Gerar to Abimelech who is the King of the Philistines:  
*"Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines."* (Ge 26:1 ESV)

This would occur after Ishmael died, which is 123 years from where we are today, so this is not the same person, but the same title, something like Pharaoh, Prime Minister or President.

Now before we read the next verse, I want to give you a little back story that will come up at the end of the chapter, but it helps you to slip on Abimelech's sandals. As you will see in a moment, it **appears** that **Abimelech has been struck with some form of lethal infirmity** and he is **very sick**.

As you will also see in a moment, **whatever is happening in his palace** is also affecting all of the **females**, for we will read in a bit that **their wombs have been closed**. It is possible that some **type of plague is spreading through the palace**.

In this setting **God shows** up to Abimelech.

**Vs 3** - So in the midst of all this, God comes to this pagan king, **in a dream**, as the king slept.

**Just an interesting point:** It is interesting to note that **God occasionally appeared** to a pagan person (often a person in power) in a dream:

- Abimelech here
- Laban – Gen 31:24
- Pharaoh – Gen 41:1
- Nebuchadnezzar - Dan 2
- Pilot's wife - Mat 27:19

**Back to our story:** God comes, and in this dream, in a way that is crystal clear to Abimelech, God says to him, short, succinct, concise, and pithy: **"Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."**

**God cuts right to the chase**, and nothing could be **more direct** and **more to the point**, it breaks down like this:

- 1) **I am going to kill you.** You are as good as a dead man.
- 2) The reason. You have taken into your haram this woman (Sarah) who is **a man's wife!**

**APPLICATION:** We are often trying to understand God's will at some point. Here God makes His will in this particular matter crystal clear!

**Vs 4-5** - Moses provides some **helpful commentary**: Abimelech had not **approached her**. This seems to be beyond Abimelech has not slept with her, he has not even approached her!

The Hebrew word translated approach is: **קָרַב (qarab)** it means to **come near**, to **draw near**, to **approach**. So, it seems Moses is telling his readers that Abimelech has not even attempted to consummate the marriage.

\*\*\* It seems, in this dream, **Abimelech responds to Adonai** and says:

- 1) **Lord will you kill an innocent people?** If Abimelech is unfamiliar with the true and living God he is getting a crash course on who God is on this day.
  - a. Do you see the mercy of God?
- 2) Apparently, Abimelech had spoken with Abraham and here he is telling God: ***Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'?***
- 3) More than that, I spoke with Sarah along the way, and **she said: 'He is my brother.'** Even she told me the exact same thing.
- 4) "In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this."

**HCSB – "I did this with a clear conscience and clean hands."**

So Abimelech responds I have operated above board (human perspective) and have not touched this woman. How can you hold me, and my people guilty?

**Vs 6** - In this dream, God responds to Abimelech:

- 1) I concur you have done this in the **integrity of your heart**.
  - a. God looks at the heart and responds to **Abimelech's heart**.

**APPLICATION:** "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."" (1Sa 16:7 ESV)

- 2) **BUT, it was I who kept you from sinning against me.**
  - a. He further explains: ***Therefore I did not let you touch her.***

Here is what God is saying, were it not for me you would have already been like a bee to honey with this woman. I stopped you from touching her. It is possible it was through this sickness, we cannot be sure.

**THEOLOGICAL POINT:** God is sovereign, he is sovereign over the affairs of all men. Lost or saved, it does not matter. He can, in a way that is not perceivable to those involved, prevent men from doing things, if he so desires.

A point like this is worthy of a few Bible verses:

"Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps." (Ps 135:6 ESV)

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will." (Pr 21:1 ESV)

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." (Pr 19:21 ESV)

**Vs 7 – Point - 3)** Now then **return the man's wife,**

- a. **For he is a prophet.**

The Hebrew word translated prophet is **נָבִיא (nabiy')** and **Abraham is the first in the Old Testament** who is **called a prophet** in the Old Testament.

- 4) In doing this he (Abraham) will *pray for you, and you shall live*. Here we have an **indication** that he was ill and that it appeared to be terminal.

**\*\* This man (who by the way told this half-truth) will pray for you and you shall live. \*\***

- 5) *But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours*. Yahweh is giving instructions to Abimelech that will prevent his destruction.

**APPLICATION:** God is still doing that today. He is doing it through the church to the world! **Instructions to prevent men and women's destruction!**

**Now this is direct as it gets.** If you do not return her, you need to know and understand **you will die**. OK, put on Abimelech's sandals for a moment, what is going through your head?

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*8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" 11 Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' 12 Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. 13 And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother."'"*

**Vs 8** - I suspect that **Abimelech rose, very early** in the morning. I would not be surprised if sleep escaped him for the rest of the night, following this dream where the Creator of the Universe says I am going to kill you and he got out of bed early in the morning.

Next, Abimelech calls his servants together, we can imagine that this is his court, those who serve on his court, and the king summons his servants. He tells them all that he **experienced through the night**.

Then we read this in verse 8b: *And the men* (his servants, likely those of his court) *they were very much afraid*. By the way, in the Hebrew it means they were *"very afraid."*

We do not know **what God** these people worshipped, but hearing this story from the king **convinced his servants**, especially when we consider illness may have been sweeping through the palace, that **this God, who had come to Abimelech in a dream** was the **"real deal!"**

Again, we see God's **threats of judgment**, but do we not also see **God's mercy and grace**? He is coming to this pagan king in a dream. He is telling him what to do to live. **OHHHH the grace of God!**

**Vs 9** - Then Abimelech called Abraham, we can imagine that Abraham is **summoned to appear** at Abimelech's palace.

The king asks Abraham two questions and provides one overarching statement or conclusion:

- 1) **What have you done to us?** He sees this act against his nation.
- 2) **What have I done to you that would cause you to do this to me** and my kingdom?

**ACCUSATION:** You have done to me things that ought not be done.

**IRONY:** This **pagan king** is **rightly accusing** a patriarch of the faith. The King is right!

**APPLICATION:** Just because a lost person makes a complaint does not mean that it is factually wrong.

**Vs 10-11** - Before any questions can be answered, Abimelech asks Abraham a **third question**.

**3) What did you see, that would cause you to do this?**

Here it appears the king pauses and provides Abraham a window, an opportunity to respond. Abraham responds and his response is **quite telling!**

**Vs 11** - Here is Abraham's response: *"I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'"*

**1) Let this sink in**, for the weakness we saw in Sarah's faith, when the Bible told us that **she was afraid**, is the same weakness we now see in Abraham. **He is afraid!**

You see Abraham looked at his circumstances, they were overwhelmingly bad, and he concluded, through his own power and his own ingenuity he would need to deliver himself. **He was afraid...**

**APPLICATION:** *"The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe."* (Pr 29:25 ESV)

**Jesus speaking:** *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Mt 10:28 ESV)

**\*\*\* Fear caused Sarah to doubt, and fear has now caused Abraham to put the whole see promise into possible jeopardy! \*\*\***

**Vs 12** - So first he was afraid.

**2) Now his second excuse, his second justification. Well, she is actually my sister. WOW!** It is not a complete lie, but only a half lie. But, let's be honest, the **larger deal** is **she is his wife**.

From a human perspective this little fear has put in jeopardy God's plan to bring forth the Messiah from the union of Abraham and Sarah.

**Vs 13 - Excuse number 3) - this has been my practice!** Sarah and I agreed to do this. This of course is true, we saw this happen 24 or so years ago:

*"10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.'"* (Ge 12:10-13 ESV)

**Notice, who came up with this plan?** Yep Abraham, who negatively influenced his wife. **MEN?**

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*14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." 16 To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all[a] who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated." 17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.*

**Vs 14 - First**, Abimelech **gives gifts** to Abraham including, sheep, oxen, male servants and female servants.

**Second**, Abimelech **returns Abraham's wife** to him. It is **worth mentioning**, at least in passing the Abimelech appears to be an honest, wise, and even a **stand-up guy**.

**It is also worth mentioning** that Abram would not take any gifts from the King of Sodom, but here he does take gifts from the King of Gerar.

**Vs 15 -** This is the land of Gerar, and the king says, **dwell where you like**.

Abimelech's response stands in contrast to Pharaoh's response:

*"18 So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."'" (Ge 12:18-19 ESV)*

**POINT TO PONDER:** Abraham continues to get more wealthy, and we see God is dealing with Abraham, just like He does with you and me. According to grace!

**Vs 16 - Then Abimelech, speaks to Sarah** and he says, I have given **your brother** 1,000 pieces of silver as a **sign of your innocence** in the eyes of everyone who saw this. This clears you of even the **shadow of suspicion**.

But it also clears Abimelech, notice he refers to Abraham as **Sarah's brother**. For that is what **both of them had told him!**

**Thus, you are vindicated.** The Hebrew word used here is a **tough word** and understanding Abimelech's exact point is a little tough.

The Hebrew word is **יָכַח (yakach) (yaw-kahh')**, it means to **prove, judge, decide, rebuke, or correct**. So the word could be **vindicated**, but it could be **rebuked!**

His actions are **public** and appear to be occurring so that **everyone** understands (in the eyes of all) he did not have sex with this woman, and she is equally innocent of any wrong doing (**rebuke or vindication**).

So, this silver, in addition to what Abimelech has already given to Abraham.

**Vs 17 -** Abimelech gave gifts, Abraham prayed, and **God healed Abimelech** (again this was not explained up-front, but it is explained here)!

Abraham told a lie, that set all of this in motion. Then this guy who set it all in motion prays and God heals Abimelech. God is not dealing with Abraham based on merit, but instead based on **GRACE**.

**APPLICATION:** This is what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion. **It is not about us doing something to merit favor, but us receiving God's GRACE!**

Also, God healed the **king's wife** and the **female slaves** of the king, so that they could all bear children again. Now we had no idea that some type of plague was sweeping through Abimelech's palace.

So, am I telling you to go lie so that you can get more money and God will hear your prayers? **NO!**

Paul asked the church in Rome that very question:

*"1 ¶ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Ro 6:1-4 ESV)*

**I am telling you God relates to you and I based on grace, not based on merit!**

**Vs 18** - Now we learn that this went on for a **little bit of time**, for during this time **Yahweh had closed all the wombs** in Abimelech's palace, and **he did so because of Sarah!**

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*1 ¶ The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*

**Vs 1** - **There are a few things worth noting here:**

1) Yahweh did not **appear to her**, but **he visited her**.

2) This is precisely what **He had said He would do:**

*"13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." (Ge 18:13-14 ESV)*

3) The Lord did to Sarah as **He had promised:**

*By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised." (Heb 11:11 ESV)*

Her body had **passed through menopause**, it was **no longer humanly possible** for her to get pregnant. But she received power to do the impossible (due her age) bear a child from Abraham.

4) This is yet **another fulfilled prophecy!**

**Vs 2** - Sarah, **got pregnant** and bore Abraham a son, **in his old age** (again he would be 100) at the time of Isaac's birth, at the time God had said it would happen.

**Do you see it again? “Of which God had spoken...”** The God who cannot lie, in spite of how impossible the scenario is, keeps his promises. He does what he had **previously spoken!**

All of this happened, at the **appointed time!**

Just as Jesus came in the fullness of time, exactly on God’s timeframe, so too, the birth of Issac, happened at the appointed time.

**APPLICATION:** God executes his plan on His timetable. He does not succumb to our timetable. This is a good lesson for us on patience.

As you think about this, I hope you see just how powerful our God really His. He predicted, that a woman who had passed through menopause would have a child in about a year from when He made the promise.

**Then, with the deck stacked squarely against Himself, He went and fulfilled His Word!**

**Vs 3 – As directed,** Abraham named his son Isaac (which means) **He laughs.**

**Vs 4 -** Going back to how Abraham was to keep the covenant. At eight days old Abraham circumcised Isaac, **as God had commanded him back in Genesis 17.**

As we have said many times, Abraham was **justified** years before he was **circumcised!** Just a reminder!

**Vs 5 -** This is exactly what God said would happen!

Isaac stands as the **first**, who was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, in response to the covenant that God made with Abraham!

**Vs 6 -** Put yourself in Sarah’s position, what is going through your heart?

From **barrenness to joy**, from **brokenness to restoration**, from **tears of sorrow, to tears of joy**

As I think about this piece of the story: Abraham laughed in joy, Sarah laughed in unbelief, God seemed to say laugh it all up, but I will fulfill my promise. Now Sarah laughs for joy.

Everyone who hears of this story, including you and I should join Sarah in laughing for joy over the goodness of our amazing God!

**Vs 7 -** The answer is **God would have said it**, in fact He did. That is our God!

Do you recognized that the God you serve, has all power and as God asked Sarah two weeks ago, He would ask us:

**“13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD...” (Ge 18:13-14a ESV)**

Or, as I told you. Is there any wonder, is there any marvel that the Mighty God cannot do in your life?

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