

# Genesis 20 Commentary

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Summary Chart of The Book of Genesis								
Focus	Foundation Events (Four Events) (Events Predominant)				Foundation People (Four People) (People Predominant)			
Divisions	Creation (Ge 1-2)	Fall (Ge 3-5)	Flood (Ge 6-9)	Nations (Ge 10-12)	Abraham's Faith (Ge 12-24)	Isaac's Family (Ge 25-26)	Jacob's Conflicts (Ge 27-36)	Joseph's Calamity (Ge 37-50)
Topics	Beginning of the Human Race (Race As A Whole)				Beginning of the Hebrew Race (Family of Abraham)			
	Faithfulness of Mankind (Noah)				Faithfulness of One Man's Family (Abraham)			
	Historical				Biographical			
Place	Eastward From Eden to Ur				Westward From Canaan to Egypt			
Time	~2000+ Years (20% of Genesis) (~4004-2090BC)				About 300 Years 193 Yr in Canaan, 93 Yr in Egypt (80% of Genesis) (2090-1804BC)			
	Primeval History of Humanity				Patriarchal History of Israel			
Author	Moses							

## BEGINNINGS

- Ge 1:1-25 - The Universe (Everything)
- Ge 1:26-2:25 - The Human Race
- Ge 3:1-7 - Sin Enters the World
- Ge 3:8-24- God Promises Redemption from Bondage to Sin
- Ge 4:1-15 - Family Life
- Ge 4:16ff - Civilization
- Ge 10:1-11:32 - The Nations of the World
- Ge 12:1ff - The Story of Israel and the Jews



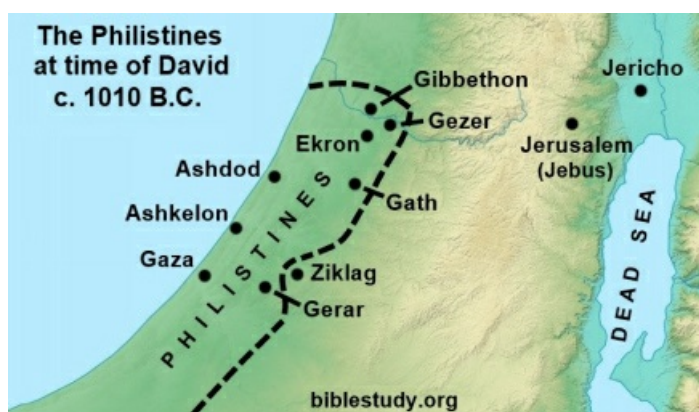
Abraham believed God (Gal 3:6<sup>±</sup>, Ge 15:5,6<sup>±</sup>)

**Genesis 20:1** Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar.

- **Negev:** Ge 13:1 18:1 24:62
- **Kadesh:** Gen. 14:7; Gen. 16:14; Gen. 20:1; Num. 13:26; Num. 20:1; Num. 20:14; Num. 20:16; Num. 20:22; Num. 27:14; Num. 33:36; Num. 33:37; Deut. 1:46; Deut. 32:51; Jdg. 11:16; Jdg. 11:17; Ps. 29:8; Ezek. 47:19; Ezek. 48:28
- **Gerar:** Gerar was a city of Arabia Petrea, under a king of the Philistines, 25 miles from Eleutheropolis beyond Daroma, in the south of Judah. From ch. 10:19, it appears to have been situated in the angle where the south and west sides of Canaan met, and to have been not far from Gaza. Jerome, in his Hebrew Traditions on Genesis, says, from Gerar to Jerusalem was three days' journey. There was a wood near Gerar, spoken of by Theodoret; and a brook, (ch. 26:26,) on which was a monastery, noticed by Sozomen. Ge 10:19 26:1,6,20,26 2Ch 14:13,14
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Passages:

Hebrews 11:9+ By faith he (ABRAHAM) lived as an alien (PAROIKEO - A SOJOURNER) in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;



Location of Gerar in Philistine Territory

[Paul Apple](#) - INTRODUCTION: We have been tracking Abraham in his journey of faith. We have seen him rise to great heights –

such as when he manifested such a magnanimous spirit in Chap. 12 to give his nephew Lot the choice of where to live; or when the Lord used him in Chap. 14 to deliver Lot and the residents of Sodom from the confederacy of invading kings; or when he interceded on behalf of Lot and his family despite the wickedness around them in Sodom and Gomorrah. But we have also seen surprising lapses in his dependence on God – such as when he passed off Sarah as his sister back in Chap. 12 as a means of self-preservation. Here again we see that same sin revisited. It is as if Abraham is on some type of treadmill of besetting sins – repeating the same unwise behavior over and over so that he fails to make any progress. Yet we are struck by the mercy and power of God who intervenes to still protect Sarah and Abraham and accomplish the fulfillment of His covenant promise. What an embarrassment it must have been for Abraham to have been rebuked by this pagan king who was filled with moral shock and indignation at the outrageous behavior of his guest that had endangered the royal family. How could Abraham have so blatantly repeated the same moral blunder? Yet that is true for all of us. We each have particular sins that might not seem so threatening to others, but seem to enslave us in a grip that we have trouble breaking. Abraham was a giant when it came to trusting God. But in certain types of pressure situations he still resorted to his own human scheming and patterns of deception to try to help God out and preserve his life. This in spite of God's clear promises of what he would accomplish in the lives of Abraham and Sarah; this in spite of God's demonstrated faithfulness over and over in proving His greatness (there is nothing too difficult for God) and His goodness (Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?). **GOD OVERRULES EVEN OUR BESETTING SINS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS KINGDOM PURPOSES**

[J Vernon McGee](#) - Chapter 20 seems about as necessary as a fifth leg on a cow. It is a chapter that you feel as if you would like to leave out, because in it Abraham repeat the same sin which he committed when he went down into the land of Egypt and lied concerning Sarah, saying, "She is my sister." It is the same sordid story, but this chapter is put here for a very important reason. Abraham and Sarah are going to have to deal with this sin before they can have Isaac, before they can have the blessing. May I say to you, until you and I are willing to deal with the sin in our lives, there is no blessing for us.

*Until you and I are willing to deal with the sin in our lives,  
there is no blessing for us.*

[Bruce Goettsche](#) entitles Genesis 20 "Embarrassing Reruns"

[Keith Krell](#) entitles this chapter "Been There, Done That!" He introduces this chapter...

Some time ago, I read about a pastor that preaches a sermon series every year called "Summer Reruns."<sup>1</sup> Each summer, when the attendance plummets, he preaches his most popular sermons from the previous year. You could call this, "Pastor's Greatest Hits."

As we eyeball Genesis 20, you may feel that we are having our own summer reruns! If you have been studying with us, you are about to experience a strange sense of **déjà vu**. Previously, we looked at a very similar account in Genesis 12:10-20. In that passage, Abraham and Sarah devised a scheme to avoid problems with Pharaoh in Egypt. Abraham asked his wife to lie and tell the Pharaoh that she was his sister. Now, eight chapters later, the names and places are changed but the results are nearly identical. This has led some to say it really was the same account recorded twice. Yet, clearly these are two different accounts.<sup>2</sup> The reason we take up this second account is because it speaks to an issue that is relevant to all of us: recurring sin. Here, we see Abraham making the same mistake again.

**These things should not surprise us. It parallels our own experience. Aren't there things in your own life that dog you relentlessly? Are there sins that you have taken to the Lord and said, "Never again?" Only to find yourself returning to the Lord to confess the same sin again and again.** It may have to do with substances (alcohol, drugs, food). It may have to do with interpersonal relationships (gossip, anger, slander). It may be physical (some habit you can't shake). It may be mental (lust, anger, bitterness, resentment). It may have to do with money (debt, a lust for the material, a reluctance to give to the Lord). It may have to do with time management (wasting time, neglecting time for God). **Whatever the sin, I suspect you don't have to look very far to find one or two that you struggle with constantly.** Today, in Genesis 20, we will look at how to move toward victory in the embarrassing reruns of life.<sup>3</sup>

**Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the [Negev](#), and settled between [Kadesh](#) ("holy" - oasis ~70 mi SW of Dead Sea) and [Shur](#) ("wall" - the wilderness region in the NW part of the Sinai isthmus) - Journeyed is the verb [nasa](#) which means, "to pull up" stakes that stabilize a tent and is a technical term for "breaking camp." Where is "from there?" According to Genesis 18:1, "from there" is a reference to "the oaks of Mamre," which was located in "Hebron" nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem, on the way to Beersheba. Recall **Negev** means south. So Abraham is headed south. The text does not explain why**

Abraham was on the move. Earlier in Genesis 12 he had headed south because of famine, but there is no mention of famine. Why did he leave now? The text does not say. Possibly he desired to move away from the scene of recent judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Was he operating in unbelief or at the direction of the Lord? Given his actions in Gerar one would favor the former as more likely. The other question that arises is why didn't he make any attempt to locate Lot? He did not know whether he was alive or dead? If he believed that God had answered his prayer to deliver Lot, he would have stayed or at least searched for Lot but it appears he didn't.

**THOUGHT** - The word Shur means "fortification or security". It comes from a Hebrew root word meaning "to turn or wander about; to stroll; to look around". I added "to be independent". How many times we turn from the Lord and look around for something better than the Lord, wandering away from Him? Our independent spirit can create a big mess for us. Amen?! Does this describe the condition of your life? Have you drifted away from Jesus Christ? Many believers have strayed, some a small distance and others far, far away from the Lord. They are dwelling somewhere between Kadesh and Shur. This describes the spiritual condition of Abraham in this chapter. Abraham suffers some spiritual defeats that have happened earlier in his life. The says he sojourned in Gerar which comes from a Hebrew root word "gur" meaning "to drag; to turn aside from the way; to fear; to tarry; to be a stranger". What a description to what was happening to Abraham at this particular time. Abraham turns from honesty back to deception in Gerar because he is a stranger and fears the king of this region. Sarah is removed from his home and "drug away" if you please to be a bride of Abimelech. (Rod Mattoon)

At least he remains in the land of promise (Ge 15:18) and does not trek all the way to Egypt this time. Abraham did not get into trouble in Gerar because he is out of the geographical will of God since Gerar is still in the land of Canaan but he did get into trouble for lying as he misrepresents Sarah as his sister and not as his wife.

*"Abraham stopped asking 'What is right?'  
and began asking 'What is safe?'  
and this led to his downfall."*

-- Warren Wiersbe

**THOUGHT** - Be careful when you begin to ask "What is safe?" or "What can I get away with?" Proverbs 15:3 says "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good."

[Keith Krell](#) Why did Abraham leave Mamre (cf. 18:1)? While no reason for Abraham's move is given, it would seem that God pouring out burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah had some effect on Abraham's ability to raise his great herds of cattle (cf. 21:22-34).<sup>4</sup> Despite the logic of Abraham's move, there is no indication that God led this decision. Apparently, once again, he took matters into his own hands and moved ahead of God. I don't know about you but when I've made decisions apart from the will of God, I have invariably suffered for it. Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." No other possible reasons for Abraham's relocation include: (1) He wanted to move away from the painful memories of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and on the gruesome death of Lot's extended family. (2) His life was in danger from the surviving villagers in Zoar.

[Wenstrom](#) adds an interesting thought "Undoubtedly, Satan, knowing that the Lord is about to fulfill His promise and give Abraham and Sarah a child, is going to attempt to thwart the Lord's plans in Gerar." (SEE [SATANIC ATTEMPTS TO THWART THE MESSIANIC LINE](#))

**Sailhamer** writes, "Abraham left the 'great trees of Mamre' (Ge 18:1, 33) and traveled into 'the Negev' (hannegeb i.e., 'southward') to sojourn in Gerar. The fact that the author has reminded us in chapter 21 (Ge 21:23b, 34a) that Abraham was still sojourning in Gerar suggests that the events of these two chapters are intended to be understood as having taken place in the 'land of the Philistines' (Ge 21:34; see Notes)." (Genesis: EBC Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990),



Source: [Abraham: Following God's Promise](#)

Then he sojourned ([gur](#)) in [Gerar](#) - Sojourned ([gur](#)) means he entered [Gerar](#) as an alien, one who would dwell temporarily. [Gerar](#) (means "lodging place" or "halting place") was a prosperous city controlling a lucrative caravan route and was located about 12 miles SE of Gaza and 50 miles south of Hebron in the land of the Philistines (see map above). **Elmer Towns** writes [Gerar](#) "was probably so named because it was a popular rest stop along the caravan route. But for Abraham, it became **ahalting place** in his walk with God." The Septuagint translates [sojourned](#) ([gur](#)) with paroikeo (used of Abraham in Heb 11:9+) which means living in a place without holding citizenship, as an alien, as a stranger, and only temporarily.

[Wenstrom](#) points out that as a sojourner "In societies, which possess a clan structure, this person is without legal protection since he has no blood ties. Such a person, like Abraham, would have been dependent upon a native to recognize and protect him, which was the case we saw in Egypt and here in Gerar. The Mari documents (1800 B.C.) indicate that the relationship between "sitting" farmers and nomadic herders (such as Abraham) was that contracts were drawn up concerning grazing and watering rights. This relationship is known as "dimorphism" as these two distinct yet interrelated cultures exist side by side. Abraham is entering into a land, where he no legal rights and protection, which will affect his decision-making and will cause him to enter into a contract that will compromise his wife and integrity and witness before the unbeliever."

**Henry Morris** - Gerar was capital of the Philistine colony on the seacoast. The Philistines were descendants of Ham through Mizraim, and apparently were originally from Crete. Some centuries later, they all migrated to Canaan and became a strong coastal nation, inveterate enemies of Israel. The name Palestine came from them. The title of their kings at this time was Abimelech, similar to Pharaoh in Egypt. (BORROW [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Matthew Henry (Concise)** - Verses 1-8. Crooked policy will not prosper: it brings ourselves and others into danger. God gives Abimelech notice of his danger of sin, and his danger of death for his sin. Every wilful sinner is a dead man, but Abimelech pleads ignorance. If our consciences witness, that, however we may have been cheated into a snare, we have not knowingly sinned against God, it will be our rejoicing in the day of evil. It is matter of comfort to those who are honest, that God knows their honesty, and will acknowledge it. It is a great mercy to be hindered from committing sin; of this God must have the glory. But if we have ignorantly done wrong, that will not excuse us, if we knowingly persist in it. He that does wrong, whoever he is, prince or peasant, shall certainly receive for the wrong which he has done, unless he repent, and, if possible, make restitution.

[Bruce Goettsche](#) on Abraham's repeat sin writes that "Believers Sin. Have you ever had someone tell you that all Christians are hypocrites because of their inconsistency? They hear us proclaim a love of holiness but they also see us sin. A Christian stumbles and all the world seems to point their finger at them. This shows that there is an inherent misunderstanding of grace and discipleship. Grace is given to us not because we are good but because God is gracious and good even though we are not. In fact, one of the prerequisites of salvation is a confession that we are helpless to save ourselves. Before we can be "saved" we have to confess that we are sinners. When we do this and receive the gift of life that comes from the Lord we are made clean before the Lord . . . sin's penalty is taken care of. . . however, sin's power and influence continues to pursue us. Old habits die hard . . . very hard. Listen to that familiar testimony from the Apostle Paul Romans 7:16-25NLT+ (READ). Don't these words describe your experience? Isn't there a desire within you to honor the Lord in all you do? Yet, in your experience don't you often find that you stumble and fall? We want to act like a child of God but we often act more like a child of the world. Paul says there are two natures at war within us. There is the spiritual nature that we are given in Christ, but there is also the sinful nature and all the habits associated with it. This does not excuse our sin. But it does remind us that overcoming sin involves a struggle. I hope this realization helps you to get up after you fail. I also hope it helps you to extend mercy to those brothers and sisters around you who fall. We are to push each other to holiness but realize that living a holy life is a lifelong struggle.

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**Sojourned** ([01481](#)) [gur](#) means a temporary stay, to reside temporarily, to dwell as a foreigner; a short stay somewhere. In the reflexive sense, to seek hospitality with. The first use of [gur](#) is Ge 12:10 of the Abram (cp use with other patriarchs - Ge



20:1, 21:23, 34, 26:3, 32:4, 25:27, 47:4). The term is commonly used of the patriarchs who sojourned in Canaan (Gen. 26:3; 35:27); places outside Canaan (Gen. 12:10; 20:1; 21:23; 32:4[5]; 4

**Negev** (05045) **negeb** is a masculine noun meaning the South, south. Negev often (36x) refers to the area around Beersheba and south of it (Ge 12:9; 13:1; 20:1). Negev also refers to the southern district of Judah and more specifically to indicate the area south of Judah (Jer. 13:19; 17:26), but these areas are not always precisely defined. It may indicate land south of Babylon or southern Palestine (Isa. 21:1).

**Gilbrant** - The noun negev has a number of meanings. Its primary meaning is a geographic region. Because this region lay to the south of the rest of the Promised Land, the word became a synonym for dārôm, "south." The meaning "south" is easily understood as "toward the Negeb." That it can simply mean the cardinal direction "south" is attested in Dan. 8:9. Indeed, in Daniel the notion of south is extended to include Egypt (Dan. 11:15, 29). The noun also means "arid land" (cf. Middle Hebrew usage), a designation which denotes a number of regions, all of which happen to be in the south (perhaps begging the question of whether the noun does have this nuance at all, or are the authors simply referring to the Negeb; see Josh. 12:8).

The region of the Negeb extends roughly from a line drawn from Gaza through the modern political boundary of the southern West Bank, extending south to the mountain ranges of the Sinai and through the Arabah to the Red Sea. Beer-Sheba and Arad, the two most significant sites in the region, are in the northern region. Agriculture is possible now, and archaeological research has established that the region currently suitable for agriculture was even more suitable in the past, as the rainfall patterns in the region did not become sparse until the Early Bronze period. As one progresses southward, rainfall lessens, until one reaches the desert regions bounding the Sinai and the Red Sea. Pastoralism played a major role throughout the region (e.g., the migrations of Abraham were centered in the northern reaches of this region).

The southern part of the Negeb was long prized by Egypt on account of its copper mines. The area around Timna is renowned, and was not only the seat of Egyptian military outposts, but was in the cultural heartland of the Midianites as the Israelites entered the Promised Land. The Egyptians maintained waystations throughout the region. The Israelites, once in control of the region, likewise exploited the resource. The construction of the ports of Ezion-Geber and Elath (1 Ki. 9:26) was a direct infrastructural response to the mines. The area became a region for religious pilgrims, with the tradition of the mountain of Yahweh (Sinai/Horeb/Teman) in the vicinity. The remains of the village of Deir Alla and its shrine shed light on popular religion of the day (ninth century b.c.).

The region was divided among the tribes of Simeon and Judah, though Judah came to dominate the entirety of the land (Josh. 15:20-62; 19:1-7). The area was mainly home to military outposts and forts during the monarchy. Forts were built in the eleventh and tenth centuries b.c. Villages thinned in the ninth and eighth centuries. The Assyrian kings Sargon II (720 b.c.) and Sennacherib (701 b.c.) destroyed most of the villages as well as the military installations. They were rebuilt in the seventh century b.c., as protection against the Edomites and, later, the Babylonians.

A number of significant events transpired in the Negeb. Many of the Patriarchal narratives were set in this region. Moses (Num. 14:44), Saul (1 Sam. 14) and David (1 Sam. 30) all fought wars here against the Amalekites. Jeremiah prophesied restoration, that both agricultural land (32:44) and flocks (33:13) would again be in the hands of their rightful Israelite owners throughout Judah, including in the Negeb.

**Negeb - Negev(36), South(11), south(45), south side(2), south\*(3), southeast\*(1), southern(2), southward(9).** Gen. 12:9; Gen. 13:1; Gen. 13:3; Gen. 13:14; Gen. 20:1; Gen. 24:62; Gen. 28:14; Exod. 27:9; Exod. 36:23; Exod. 38:9; Exod. 40:24; Num. 13:17; Num. 13:22; Num. 13:29; Num. 21:1; Num. 33:40; Num. 34:3; Num. 34:4; Num. 35:5; Deut. 1:7; Deut. 34:3; Jos. 10:40; Jos. 11:2; Jos. 11:16; Jos. 12:8; Jos. 15:1; Jos. 15:2; Jos. 15:3; Jos. 15:4; Jos. 15:7; Jos. 15:8; Jos. 15:19; Jos. 15:21; Jos. 17:9; Jos. 17:10; Jos. 18:5; Jos. 18:13; Jos. 18:14; Jos. 18:15; Jos. 18:16; Jos. 18:19; Jos. 19:34; Jdg. 1:9; Jdg. 1:15; Jdg. 1:16; Jdg. 21:19; 1 Sam. 14:5; 1 Sam. 20:41; 1 Sam. 27:10; 1 Sam. 30:1; 1 Sam. 30:14; 2 Sam. 24:7; 1 Ki. 7:25; 1 Ki. 7:39; 1 Chr. 9:24; 1 Chr. 26:15; 1 Chr. 26:17; 2 Chr. 4:4; 2 Chr. 4:10; 2 Chr. 28:18; Ps. 126:4; Isa. 21:1; Isa. 30:6; Jer. 13:19; Jer. 17:26; Jer. 32:44; Jer. 33:13; Ezek. 20:46; Ezek. 20:47; Ezek. 21:4; Ezek. 40:2; Ezek. 46:9; Ezek. 47:1; Ezek. 47:19; Ezek. 48:10; Ezek. 48:16; Ezek. 48:17; Ezek. 48:28; Ezek. 48:33; Dan. 8:4; Dan. 8:9; Dan. 11:5; Dan. 11:6; Dan. 11:9; Dan. 11:11; Dan. 11:14; Dan. 11:15; Dan. 11:25; Dan. 11:29; Dan. 11:40; Obad. 1:19; Obad. 1:20; Zech. 7:7; Zech. 14:4; Zech. 14:10

**ANSWER** - There are actually several men named Abimelech in the Bible. Some translations, such as the NIV, spell the name *Abimelek*. Either way, the name means “father of the king.”

Some of the Philistines kings are called “Abimelech.” For example, the king of Gerar who took Sarah into his harem is called “Abimelech” in Genesis 20:2. The same name is applied to the king of Gerar during Isaac’s sojourn there (Genesis 26:1). The king of Gath before whom David played the madman is also called “Abimelech” in the title of Psalm 34; however, 1 Samuel 21:11 identifies the king of Gath as Achish. This has led many scholars to believe that, among the Philistines at least, *Abimelech* was a title given the king, rather than a personal name—much as the Egyptians always called their king “Pharaoh.”

Another possible Abimelech in the Bible was a son of the high priest [Abiathar](#), mentioned in 1 Chronicles 18:16. The NAS, KJV, and NET Bibles put the name as *Abimelech*. But the NIV, ESV, and HCS Bibles have *Ahimelech* (or *Ahimelek*). This Abimelech/Ahimelech was a priest who served in the time of King David.

But probably the most well-known Abimelech in the Bible is the headstrong and murderous son of [Gideon](#) in the [book of Judges](#). Please see our article on this particular [Abimelech](#) for more information. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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### Matthew Henry Notes: Chapter: 20

We are here returning to the story of Abraham; yet that part of it which is here recorded is not to his honour. The fairest marbles have their flaws, and, while there are spots in the sun, we must not expect any thing spotless under it. The scripture, it should be remarked, is impartial in relating the blemishes even of its most celebrated characters. We have here,

- I. Abraham's sin in denying his wife, and Abimelech's sin thereupon in taking her (Ge 20:1, 2).
- II. God's discourse with Abimelech in a dream, upon this occasion, wherein he shows him his error (Ge 20:3), accepts his plea (Ge 20:4-6), and directs him to make restitution (Ge 20:7).
- III. Abimelech's discourse with Abraham, wherein he chides him for the cheat he had put upon him (Ge 20:8-10), and Abraham excuses it as well as he can (Ge 20:11-13).
- IV. The good issue of the story, in which Abimelech restores Abraham his wife (Ge 20:14-16), and Abraham, by prayer, prevails with God for the removal of the judgment Abimelech was under (Ge 20:17, 18).

Ge 20:1-2 Here is,

**1. Abraham's removal from Mamre, where he had lived nearly twenty years, into the country of the Philistines** He sojourned in Gerar, Ge 20:1. We are not told upon what occasion he removed, whether terrified by the destruction of Sodom, or because the country round was for the present prejudiced by it, or, as some of the Jewish writers say, because he was grieved at Lot's incest with his daughters, and the reproach which the Canaanites cast upon him and his religion, for his kinsman's sake: doubtless there was some good cause for his removal. Note, In a world where we are strangers and pilgrims we cannot expect to be always in the same place. Again, Wherever we are, we must look upon ourselves but as sojourners.

**2. His sin in denying his wife, as before** (Ge 12:13), which was not only in itself such an equivocation as bordered upon a lie, and which, if admitted as lawful, would be the ruin of human converse and an inlet to all falsehood, but was also an exposing of the chastity and honour of his wife, of which he ought to have been the protector. But, besides this, it had here a two-fold aggravation:-

**(1.) He had been guilty of this same sin before, and had been reproved for it**, and convinced of the folly of the suggestion which induced him to it; yet he returns to it. Note, It is possible that a good man may, not only fall into sin, but relapse into the same sin, through the surprise and strength of temptation and the infirmity of the flesh. Let backsliders repent then, but not despair, Jer. 3:22.

**(2.) Sarah, as it should seem, was now with child of the promised seed**, or, at least, in expectation of being so quickly, according to the word of God; he ought therefore to have taken particular care of her now, as Jdg. 13:4.

**3. The peril that Sarah was brought into by this means:** The king of Gerar sent, and took her to his house, in order to the taking of her to his bed. Note, The sin of one often occasions the sin of others; he that breaks the hedge of God's commandments opens a gap to he knows not how many; the beginning of sin is as the letting forth of water.

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**Genesis 20:2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.**

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- said: Ge 12:11-13 26:7 2Ch 19:2 20:37 32:31 Pr 24:16 Ec 7:20 Ga 2:11,12 Eph 4:25 Col 3:9
- Abimelech: Ge 12:15 26:1,16
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Passages:

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips (LIKE ABRAHAM) are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.



"Here's my sister Abimelech!"

## ABRAHAM'S BESETTING SIN

**Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech** ("my father is king") **king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.** Sarah was now 90 and must have still been attractive to Abimelech. Abraham repeats the same deception (LYING - cf Pr 6:16-19) as before (Ge 12:13). How Abraham could have entered into the same type of deception for which he had been rebuked in Egypt (Ge 12:10-20) is hard to understand. **Abimelech** ("my father is king") was evidently a title, like Pharaoh in Egypt and ruled over Gerar was a prosperous Philistine settlement along the coast near the Egyptian border. Like Pharaoh, Abimelech took many unmarried women into his harem, even a woman near 90 who was attractive to him! Recall that in Genesis 12:11ff+ Pharaoh took Sarah into his harem when she was about 65 on account of her great beauty.

Recall that Abimelech was a title rather than a proper name (cf. Gen 26:1; Judg 8:31; 1 Sam 21:10; Ps 34 title). It meant “royal father” or “the king is my father.” **Easton's Dictionary** on [Abimelech](#) means "my father a king, or father of a king, a common name of the Philistine kings, as "Pharaoh" was of the Egyptian kings."

**Bruce K. Waltke** - The key words “his wife” and “my wife” emphasize the vital relationship of Abraham and Sarah that they jeopardize with their scheme (Gen 20:2, 3, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18)....The stories about the jeopardy of the ancestress in pagan kings’ harems form an inner frame around the Abraham cycle before the transition to the next cycle in Ge 22:20-25:11. After Abraham’s initial call to the Promised Land to become a great nation, he immediately jeopardizes Sarah in Pharaoh’s harem. Now, immediately before the birth of the promised seed, he jeopardizes the matriarch in Abimelech’s harem.” (Borrow [Genesis : a commentary page 284](#))

**THOUGHT** - “Abraham isn’t the only one returning to the same sin again and again. Look back in your own life at the past few days or weeks. You and I return to the same patterns of sin. We bring the same things before the Lord again and again, don’t we? It is easy to say, ‘Abraham, you should have known better!’ It is more difficult, however, to learn these basic lessons ourselves.” (See [The Swindoll Study Bible](#))

**Krell** - He was concerned about his own personal safety. He feared that because of Sarah’s beauty he would be killed, and she would be taken as a wife by violence. Quite simply, Abraham feared man more than he feared God. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in



hell." We can all find ourselves in situations where we are motivated by fear. Yet, God longs for us to exercise faith in Him. As the old adage says, "Those that fear God most are least afraid of men." Of course, the fear of man is merely a symptom of a core issue: unbelief. Abraham refused to trust God. If he had trusted God, he would have recognized that God was capable of protecting both he and Sarah. Abraham had a track record with God. Twenty-five years earlier, God saved him from the hand of Pharaoh (Ge 12:17-20). In this situation, Abraham did not act out of ignorance, but rather out of unbelief. Abraham's response is all the more disheartening since he has just been told that Sarah will give birth to the miracle-child (Ge 17:16; 18:10).<sup>10</sup> Now he risks the birth of the child by letting Sarah be taken into the harem of another pagan king (cf. Ge 12:15). Behind the staging of human history is Satan himself, attempting through Abraham's unbelief and fear to foil God's plan for a promised deliverer—Jesus Christ!

Abraham was trusted a man with his life by giving him Sarah when he should have been trusting the LORD. After all God's promise was that he was to be the father of a multitude, and yet he trusted Abimelech to keep him safe. He needed to read Ps 118:8-9+ "It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD Than to trust in princes (LIKE ABIMELECH)."

The grip of habit can be so strong,  
You find it easy to choose the wrong;  
But let God's Spirit control within,  
And He will free you from binding sin.  
—Kasper

[Steven Cole](#) gives us background on why Abimelech might want a 90 year old Sarah in his harem - Part of the answer involves the longer lifespans of people in that day. Abraham lived to 175 and Sarah to 127. Thus at 65, she would be just past the halfway point of her life, certainly not too old to retain her beauty. At 90, she would be comparable to a woman of 53 who lived to 75, so she still could be attractive, although past her youth. But the text never mentions her beauty in chapter 20. Probably Abimelech wanted her in his harem to cement an alliance with the wealthy and powerful Abraham, who posed as her brother. Later, Abimelech did enter into an alliance with Abraham (21:22-34). Thus while Sarah was not in the flower of her youth, she was an attractive woman whose family ties could help Abimelech politically.

[Rod Mattoon](#) - On the threshold of Isaac's birth, the promise of God is put in jeopardy. Abraham, what in the world are you doing?! Did you not learn your lesson from doing this years ago in Egypt (Gen. 12)? Do you not remember the rebuke of Pharaoh? Sin has a way of making us forget the consequences of former sins. Sometimes we convince ourselves that we won't get caught or have any trouble this time. Satan has found one of Abraham's weak points and brings it to light in a time of testing and fear. What we are will be revealed in trouble, testing, loss, persecution, disappointment, and death. Circumstances bring to surface what is buried in our hearts. They may reveal things about us that we do not even know about ourselves. Have you ever said or done something in a tense moment, and then afterwards asked yourself, "Why did I do that!?" or "Why did I say that?!" I've had times like these. It make me mad when I do or say dumb things, especially when it hurts others. Abraham's fear has drained his reasoning. He becomes callous and irresponsible toward Sarah and her needs and feelings. I wonder what was going on through her mind when she was given away by her husband to this king. Doesn't Abraham love me anymore? Doesn't he care about me? These thoughts may have crossed her mind. Why did Sarah ever agree to this scheme in the first place? What is she thinking?....Little did Abraham realize that he was laying a pattern of deception which would surface again in his own son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (Genesis 26; 27). There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

Abraham's deception in Genesis 20 pictures a besetting sin. The verb **beset** literally means 'surround with hostile intent', so the image is of a sin besieging or pressing in upon a person. [Check these synonyms for beset.](#)

**THOUGHT** - Do you have a besetting sin? Most of us deal with something that keeps biting at our heels, entangling our feet and impairing our walk of holiness! Hebrews 12:1+ says "let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." God grant each of us the grace to lay aside that besetting sin that keeps entangling us. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

[Jack Arnold:](#) Abraham was guilty of this once before when he went into Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20). 1. From Abraham, we see that every saint still has a sin nature and is capable of all kinds of sins if he is not walking close to the Lord. 2. Old habits, thought to be done away with, can crop up in the life of the true believer. Former weaknesses and inveterate tendencies, which we think no longer powerful suddenly arise and bring about our downfall. Believers are often found to slip and fall where they have previously fallen. 3. Abraham illustrates the inconsistency of faith. How often those who are not afraid to trust God with their souls are afraid to trust Him with regard to their bodies. How often those who have the full assurance of faith in regard to eternal things are full of unbelief and fear when it comes to temporal things. Men resort to their own wisdom and cunning to solve their problems.

[J Vernon McGee](#) - This is quite interesting. Do you think that Sarah was beautiful? Well, at this time she is almost ninety years old,

and she's beautiful. Not many senior citizens can qualify in this particular department. Notice also that Abraham is getting quite far south in the land. He has gone beyond Kadesh-Barnea where the children of Israel later came up from Egypt and refused to enter the land. Abraham has gone down to Gerar, which I do not think he should have done, but be that as it may, he lies about Sarah again. I want you to notice Abraham's confession because this is the thing which makes this chapter important and reveals the fact that Abraham and Sarah cannot have Isaac until they deal with this sin that is in their lives—and it goes way back.

#### **Parunak ([Notes on Gen 20](#)): Components of Abraham's error:**

1. Forgetfulness of God's past protection. Thus the Scriptures exhort us frequently to "bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits."
2. Not discerning distinctions among unbelievers. Pharaoh's antagonism is very different from the inclination toward God of Abimelech.
3. The letdown after the mountaintop. Genesis 18 was certainly a high point of his experience: meeting personally with the Lord, interceding for Sodom, receiving the promise of a son. In such times, it is easy to grow self-confident, and let down our dependence on the Lord. 1Co 10:12+, "let him that thinketh he standeth, **take heed** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) lest he fall."

#### **Why does God allow His children to suffer besetting sins?**

1. Keeps us humble; attacks our pride
2. Makes us more dependent on God
3. Magnifies His power and grace in the midst of our weakness

**ABIMELECH** - The name of two kings of Philistia; the first was a contemporary of Abraham, the second, probably son of the former, was king in the days of Isaac. It is quite possible that Abimelech was the royal title rather than the personal name, since in the title of Ps 34 we find it applied to the king of Gath, elsewhere known by his personal name, Achish (1 Sam 27:2,3). Shortly after the destruction of Sodom Abraham journeyed with his herds and flocks into the extreme Southeast country of Palestine (Gen 20). While sojourning at Gerar, the city of Abimelech, king of the Philistine country, he made believe that Sarah was his sister (Gen 20:2), and Abimelech took her, intending to make her one of his wives. But God rebuked him in a dream, besides sending barrenness on the women of his household (Gen 20:3,17). After Abimelech had reproved Abraham most justly for the deception, he dealt generously with him, loading him with presents and granting him the liberty of the land (Gen 20:14,15). When contention had arisen between the servants of the two men over the wells of water the two men made a covenant at a well, which took its name, Beersheba, from this fact of covenant making (Gen 21:31,32).

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#### **Krell - The problems with lying:**

- **First, it makes it easier to do the next time.** Abraham has already pulled the same stunt with Pharaoh of Egypt twenty-five years earlier (Ge 12:13). One would think that the disgrace Abraham experienced in Egypt would have cured him. But he has not faced his proneness to needless deceit and his inconsideration towards Sarah.<sup>11</sup> Abraham is compromising his character and integrity. This will make it tougher to trust his word in the future.
- **Second, it affects and influences others around us.** The sad reality is we can pass on our character flaws to our children. Abraham lied about his wife on two occasions in order to protect his own life. These events happened before his son Isaac was born. Yet, later in Genesis, Abraham's son, Isaac, pulls this exact same stunt with his wife Rebekah and Abimelech's grandson (Ge 26:1-3, 7). Furthermore, he undoubtedly damaged his relationship with Sarah. What message does Abraham send to Sarah as he willingly lets her go to the home of another man knowing full well what the man's intentions are? Sin brings negative consequences. Some are external, some are internal; some are public, some are private. God does not allow His children to sin without consequence.
- **Third, it brings a reproach to the name of God.** Abraham's lie and subsequent exposure is an embarrassment to the name of God. Abraham compromised his ability to testify and minister in Gerar. He was supposed to bring blessing to the world...but here he is bringing judgment on them. If you are going to claim to be a Christian, please don't dishonor that name by being a habitual liar. Honesty is not the best policy; it's the only policy. Always remember: You may be the only Bible your friends and family ever read...and they expect you to be a person of integrity. Remember these sobering words: Integrity takes years to establish and only a moment to destroy.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Four ministers got away for a retreat. As they sat around the fire talking, one pastor said, "Let's all share our besetting sins. I'll go first. My besetting sin is that every so often I slip away from the office to the race track and bet on the horses."

The second pastor volunteered, "My besetting sin is that I keep a bottle of wine down in my basement. When I get really frustrated with my deacons, I sneak down there and have a nip of wine."

The third pastor gulped and said, "My besetting sin is that I keep a punching bag at home. When I get mad at somebody in the church, I go home and think about that person as I hit the punching bag."

They all turned to the fourth pastor and asked, "Well, what is your besetting sin?" He hesitated, but they coaxed him. Finally, he said, "My besetting sin is gossip, and I can't wait to get home!"

We all struggle with besetting sins. They're like a piece of furniture that you keep hitting your shin against. At some point, you would think you would learn to avoid it. But when it's been a while and you aren't thinking about it--Whack! You do it again.

Genesis 20 shows us Abraham, the father of faith, whacking his shin on the same piece of furniture. He does the same stupid thing here that he did in chapter 12: He claims that Sarah is his sister, and she is taken into the harem of a king. Liberal critics argue that these two accounts (and chapter 26, where Isaac does the same thing) are really the same story, which a not-too-smart editor mistakenly put in several places. But there are a number of obvious differences between the three accounts, and there is no reason to doubt their historicity. They are true to life and show us that certain sins plague us throughout life, and that they are often passed on to our children.

After the high point of Abraham's fellowship and prayer (chap. 18), you wouldn't think that this could happen. If the Bible was a fairy tale, it wouldn't. But the Bible is a realistic book that shows us the humanness of all its heroes. Abraham's weak areas show us the struggles in the life of faith and give us hope for ourselves. If God could work with a sinner like Abraham, then He can work with me!

There are two main themes in this chapter: the failure of Abraham; and, the faithfulness of God. Yes, Abraham sinned, but God didn't cast him off. He dealt with His erring child and followed it up by fulfilling the long-awaited promise of a son (chap. 21). That's grace! The chapter shows that ...

**While we are prone to besetting sins,  
God is marked by holiness and grace.**

There's a fine balance here. If the text only portrayed Abraham's sin and God's grace, we might be inclined toward license: "Don't worry about your sin, because God is gracious." But the chapter won't allow that wrong application. God's holiness and the damage our sin causes is balanced with His grace, so that we won't take our sin lightly. ([Steven Cole](#))

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#### QUESTION - [What are besetting sins?](#)

**ANSWER** - Besetting sins are ones that we continually struggle with and have a weakness toward. In the King James Version of the Bible, the word *beset* is found in Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, **besetting sin** refers to "a main or constant problem or fault" (m-w.com, accessed 5-11-20). Basically, a besetting sin is one that we constantly struggle with and toward which we are naturally inclined.

Other translations refer to the sins that "beset" us as "sin that so easily entangles" (NIV) and "sin that just won't let go" (CEV). The Greek word used in this verse means "easily ensnaring" (Logos Bible Word Study). Like a trap that easily captures a mouse, there are some sins that easily ensnare us.

**EDITORIAL ADDITION - Easily entangles (besetting)** ([2139](#)) [euperistatos](#) from **eú** = easily, readily, deftly, cleverly + **periistemi** = to surround, to place itself around - **peri** = around + **statos** = standing) means literally that which is easily standing around (a competitor) thwarting (a racer) in every direction (figuratively here referring to sin). The picture is that of something which is easily encompassing or easily besetting (besetting = constantly present or persistently attacking, tempting, harassing, assailing. Surrounding or attacking from all sides). There are a dozen possible renderings of **euperistatos**. The Latin Vulgate is translated "**the sin standing around us**" ("circumstans nos peccatum") and this appears to be the idea in this verse. Thus one could render it "the easily encompassing or surrounding sin." **Wuest** - Not only are the readers to lay aside every general encumbrance which would slacken their speed in the Christian race, but also any particular, specific one. The words "easily beset" are the translation of *euperistatos*, *eu* meaning "readily, deftly, cleverly," and the verbal form of the rest of the word, "to place itself around." It speaks of a sin which readily or easily encircles the Christian runner, like a long, loose robe clinging to his limbs. The sin may be any evil propensity. Here the context suggests the sin of unbelief which was the thing keeping the unsaved recipients of this letter from putting their faith in Messiah as High Priest. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

Everyone has besetting sins they constantly struggle with, whether it is gossiping, lying, losing one's temper, or lust. Christians do not automatically become perfect and sinless when we are saved (1 John 1:8); rather, we will continue to struggle against sin for the rest of our lives. We are constantly fighting against our sinful nature, as what the flesh wants conflicts with what the Spirit wants (Galatians 5:17).

The Bible gives examples of people who struggled with besetting sins. Both Abraham and Isaac fell into the same sin multiple times, when they lied about their wives to protect themselves (Genesis 12:10–13; 20:1–2; 26:7–9). In the book of Judges, Samson struggled with lust throughout his life, and it caused him many problems (Judges 14:1–3, 16–17; 16:4–5, 15–17). Similarly, David and Solomon both had a weakness in regard to women, and their lust proved troublesome (2 Samuel 11:2–27; 1 Kings 11:1–4). Besetting sins also affected those in the New Testament: the apostle Peter struggled with the fear of man, such as when he denied knowing Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69–75) and when he sided with the [Judaizers](#) in Antioch and was confronted by Paul (Galatians 2:11–14).

Besetting sins do not have to control us. In Christ, we have been set free from our sins and are no longer slaves to sin (John 8:36). We are dead to sin: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). As we lay aside “the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1), we should avoid tempting situations and relationships, making “no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14, NKJV). We should pray for wisdom and strength to change our habits. We should saturate ourselves in Scripture (Psalm 1:1–2; John 17:17). And when we sin, we should immediately seek God's wonderful mercy and grace, having this promise: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). [GotQuestions.org](#)

#### Related Resource:

- [How can I overcome a habitual sin? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [I overcame \\_\\_\\_\\_\\_ sin. How can I avoid a relapse? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [In regards to forgiveness, is there a difference between willful sin and ignorant sin? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is a sin of commission? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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[Steven Cole's](#) analysis of besetting sins - We all are prone to besetting sins. **If Abraham had one, you can be sure that we all have them!** Often, like Abraham, we fail in the everyday worries and fears of life, not in the major crises. Abraham had this long-standing fear for his safety. Back before he left his father's house, he devised this “[white” lie](#) and got Sarah to agree to it in an attempt to protect himself (Ge 20:13). **If God had called him to go, God would protect him.** So this scheme was unnecessary, illogical, and it didn't even work the two times he tried it. But it was a weak area with Abraham, and he fell into it when he got into these situations.

## FIVE OBSERVATIONS ON BESETTING SINS

### (1) BESETTING SINS ARE ALWAYS A DANGER.

I don't mean that we can't experience consistent victory over them. By God's grace and power, we can. But I do mean that there will never be a time when we're so strong spiritually that we don't have to be on guard against them. If you ever get to thinking, “I've finally got that problem licked once and for all,” look out! “Let him who thinks he stands **take heed** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12+). Abraham had walked with God for years, but he fell into the same sin that had defeated him twenty years before.

Some branches of Christianity teach that we can reach a state of sinless perfection in this life ([is sinless perfection possible in this life?](#)). How I wish it were so! The Bible teaches that we can have consistent victory over sin, but it also teaches that even the strongest saints are always vulnerable to temptation (ED: cf Mt 26:41+, 1Pe 2:11+). As long as we remember that we're weak, so that we walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16+), we'll be strong in His strength (ED: 2Ti 2:1+, 1Co 16:13+, 2Co 12:9,10+, Php 4:13+). But the minute we forget it, or start thinking we're strong in ourselves, we're in trouble (ED: Rev 2:4+ > "Remember" Rev 2:5+).

We need to be careful to avoid situations which expose us to danger (ED: Pr 5:8+, Eph 5:11+). There is no indication here that Abraham sought the Lord about his move to Gerar (Ge 20:1). Since the land of Canaan was so crucial in God's plan for Abraham and since God had blessed Abraham in his years by the oaks of Mamre, I can't believe that it was right for him to pack up and move without consulting the Lord, especially into a situation that exposed him to his old weakness.

If you know that you're easily tempted in certain situations, avoid those situations (ED: 1Co 6:18, 19+)! If you're tempted by drinking, don't go near bars. If you're tempted by lust, don't go to bookstores where pornography is sold; don't go to movies with sex scenes.

If you're tempted when you travel alone, make arrangements to be accountable and plan your free time with things that will build you in the Lord. Knowing that we're vulnerable, we need to plan not to sin!

## **(2) BESETTING SINS ARE ROOTED IN THE LOVE OF SELF.**

If Abraham had been loving God (**ED**: SEE EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION), would he have tarnished God's Name (which was associated with Abraham) by lying? If he was loving Sarah more than himself (as every husband should do; Eph. 5:25+), would he have been willing to let her be taken from his side and exposed to adultery? Why did Abraham do such a thing? Because he was afraid that he would be killed (Ge 20:11).

### **He loved himself more than he loved God or Sarah.**

I have read statements by "Christian psychologists" to the effect that most of our problems stem from feelings of low self worth. I read an article recently explaining that one reason pastors commit adultery is low self esteem. But the Bible teaches that most of our sins stem from the fact that we love ourselves more than we love God and more than we love others. Any man who commits adultery is loving himself more than he loves God, his wife, his children, and even more than he loves the other woman. If you try to overcome sin by loving yourself more, you're simply feeding the source of the problem! The answer to overcoming sin is to deny yourself, not to love yourself (Luke 9:23+).

## **(3) BESETTING SINS ALWAYS HURT OTHERS.**

We tend to think of our besetting sins as basically harmless. Abraham probably thought, "This is just a white lie. No one will get hurt." And yet his sin risked losing Sarah to another man. It must have hurt Sarah's feelings to be used as Abraham's buffer to protect his hide. And it caused Abimelech and his household to get sick and be on the verge of death (Ge 20:3, 7). We never have the luxury of sinning in private.

### **Our sin always hurts others.**

God prevented Abimelech from his unintentional sin, but God wouldn't heal him apart from Abraham's prayer (Ge 20:7, 17-18). That put Abraham in the position of having to pray that another man's wife and concubines would not be barren, a prayer that he had asked for his own wife for over 25 years! In Genesis 18, Abraham had learned to pray for those who were under judgment for their own sins. Here he learns to pray for those who had been damaged by his sin.

We can't always undo the damage our sin has caused. But we can pray for those who have been hurt by our sin. We should ask forgiveness, and make restitution when we can. But we need to remember that our sin always hurts others, and thus avoid sinning.

Besetting sins are always a danger; they stem from self-love; and, they always damage others.

## **(4) WE TEND TO EXCUSE BESETTING SINS, NOT CONFESS AND FORSAKE THEM.**

I'd like to be able to report that Abraham confessed his sin and put it out of his life. Maybe he did, but the Bible is silent on it. What we see him doing here is **making excuses for it, not confessing it**. God uses a pagan king to confront His sinning prophet. Abraham says he thought there would be no fear of God in this place (Ge 20:11), and yet the men of that place feared greatly when they heard of God's potential judgment on them (Ge 20:8), whereas Abraham had feared them more than he feared God. (**ED**: Pr 29:25 "The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.")

### **Abraham has three excuses for his sin.**

**First**, he says that the situation forced him to do it. Ever since God had "caused him to wander" from his father's house, he had been afraid he would be killed, and so he had planned this lie (Ge 20:13). What else could a man do in such a situation? But how could Abraham really be in danger of losing his life, if God had called him to go into Canaan and had promised to make a great nation out of him?

### **There is no situation where God puts you where sin is no longer sin because of the circumstances.**

**Abraham's second excuse** was to justify a half-truth as the truth, to say that Sarah was his sister. But though technically true, it was intended as a lie. The important fact in this case wasn't that she was his sister, but that she was his wife. You can bend the facts or limit them in such a way as to promote falsehood. That's lying, even if it is technically true. The motive is what counts. Abraham calls his lie a "kindness" (Ge 20:13). But a lie is never a kindness or "[a little white lie](#)." It's always sin.

**The third excuse** was, "That's the way we've always done it" (Ge 20:13). He and Sarah had agreed to do it this way years before. "Don't take it personally, Abimelech! This is just what we've always done." But just because we've always done it doesn't make it right. Maybe we've always sinned!



This story shows us how “**a little white lie**” can mushroom into a severe problem which hurts many. We’d all be a lot better off if we’d call our sin what it is--SIN--confess it and turn from it. (ED: Pr 28:13+, 1Jn 1:9+).

Thus besetting sins are always a danger; they stem from love of self; they hurt others; and, we tend to excuse them, rather than confess them. A fifth observation:

#### **(5) BESETTING SINS ALWAYS DISHONOR GOD.**

Just think what would have happened if Abimelech had consummated his relationship with Sarah! The birth of Isaac, and of Isaac’s descendant, Christ, would be forever under a cloud. Abraham wouldn’t have known if Isaac was his child in fulfillment of God’s promise or Abimelech’s child. Since Isaac was the link in God’s plan to bless all nations through Abraham’s seed, the whole Messianic program was jeopardized by Abraham’s foolish lie.

God was made to look bad through Abraham’s sin. Abimelech must have thought, “If this guy is God’s prophet, I’m not sure I want to know this God!” Abimelech, a pagan, has more integrity here than Abraham, God’s prophet. All sin dishonors God. If Abimelech had committed adultery with Sarah, it wouldn’t have primarily been a sin against Abraham. God says, “I kept you from sinning against Me” (20:6). While our sin hurts others, it always dishonors the God whom we represent.

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### **[Bruce Goettsche](#) - STEPS TO DEALING WITH RECURRING SIN**

#### **Admit and Confess the Truth.**

It is comes to dealing with sin we can't mess around. We must be honest about it. One of the biggest barriers we often face is that we all tend to maintain a "holy facade". In other words, we come together and we smile and maintain a "holy air" about us. We intentionally give the impression that we have everything together. After all, we are Christians. True believers have no problems. They don't struggle. In other words, we are really good at lying to each other. And we try to lie to God.

This is the height of foolishness. We are fellow pilgrims. We have good days and bad. We have victories and failures. And until we are willing to admit that things aren't always easy, we'll never be able to take aim at the sin we are unwilling to acknowledge.

I find that the best way to deal with recurring sin is to identify the sin completely. Get to the root issues. See it in all it's ugliness . . . here's some examples:

- **Don't just confess, "I lied".** Confess that you turned away from the truth which means you turned away from the Lord. Recognize that in your lying you showed a lack of love to the one you lied to. Confess the pride that made you want to hide the truth.
- **Don't just confess, "I lusted".** Confess that you were allowing your mind to wallow in filth. Confess that you took something from the one you love in lusting for another. Ask yourself how you would feel it is was your son or daughter that was the object of your lustful thoughts.
- **Don't confess "I took something that didn't belong to me."** Confess that you stole. Admit that you robbed another. Admit that you are guilty of coveting what is not yours. Admit that you showed that you were ungrateful for what the Lord has provided you.
- **Don't just confess, "I gossiped".** Identify it for what it really is. Confess that you assaulted another's character. Confess that you were guilty of tearing down rather than building up. Confess the pride that made you savor the gossip and the arrogance that presumes to glory in another's failure.
- **Don't just confess, "I didn't make it to church today."** Confess the fact that you allowed other things to take priority over your worship of the Lord. Confess the laziness that kept you in bed. Confess your idolatry in honoring something above the Lord.
- Do you get the idea? Don't soften sin . . . identify it as the horrible thing that it is. If we misrepresent the nature of our sin, we are opening the door for repeated failure.

#### **Avoid Tempting Situations**

The way an Eskimo kills a wolf is grizzly, yet it offers fresh insight into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin. First the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood.

Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder, the wolf licks the blade in the Arctic night. So great becomes the

craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more - until the day finds him dead in the snow. [Paul Harvey]

### *Things that seem innocent can quickly become destructive*

Things that seem innocent can quickly become destructive. We need to be alert to those things that lead us into sin. Satan will lure us in with something that appears harmless. He will tempt us to get as close to sin as we can . . . all the time assuring us that we are not "technically sinning." But if we play with sin . . . we will get burned. Joseph had the right idea . . . when his boss's wife grabbed him and tried to seduce him, he didn't play around . . . he ran.

If you have problems with lust don't linger at the magazine rack and don't rent movies that could turn your mind from the truth. Put a filtering software on your computer and have someone else set the password.

If you have trouble with wasting time . . . chart the way you use your time. Then start cutting back. Limit your time on the Internet or with your video games, or in front of the television.

If you have problems with alcohol you shouldn't go out with the boys "just to have a coke" at the local bar. Don't bring liquor into your home. Don't give in to the notion that "one won't hurt me."

If you have problems with money, don't carry a credit card. Throw away catalogs before you look at them. Turn off those infomercials!

If you have problems with gossip, walk away when gossip begins to take center stage. Learn to ask yourself, "would I want someone to be repeating these things about me?" Ask people for sources.

If you have problems with resentment or bitterness, stay away from those who feed your feelings. When your mind starts replaying the hurt and imagining getting even . . . change the channel. Imagine instead what it would be like to forgive and to restore the relationship. Imagine being faithful to God rather than imagining playing God.

### **Where Possible, Get Help from Others.**

We can all benefit from **accountability**. It helps to confess our struggles to a trusted friend. Now I know that this is very difficult. As we expose our weaknesses to others sometimes that is used against us. We have to be careful who we look to for accountability. But there is strength that comes from others knowing our areas of weakness. For one thing, those people can be praying for us. For another, it is easier to resist when we know that someone else is going to ask us about our lives. The best relationship is where you holding each other accountable.

### **Read and Memorize Scripture.**

If we want to free ourselves from sin, we must continually focus on that which is holy, good and righteous. The best way to do that is to read and **memorize Scripture**. If you are serious about eradicating sin in your life you must spend time in God's Word. It doesn't matter what system you use . . . just keep reading. Expose yourself to God's Word every day. Interact with it. Apply it to your life. Ask, "what should I be learning?" This will help you think Biblically.

Do you remember when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness? Every temptation was answered with the truth of God's Word. The only way you can do this is to commit His Word to memory. You can do this by using some memory system. Or, you can memorize verses that you run across in your own reading. When you come across a verse that speaks powerfully to a need of yours, write it down on a card and carry the card around with you. Refer to the verse often. Think about it as you drive, wait in line, or lie in bed. Arm yourself with God's Word!

**Don't Give Up** Repeated failures tempt us to give up. But that is exactly what the Devil wants us to do! Focus on the goal and not the obstacles. Remind yourself that growth takes time. Keep in mind the image of a little child learning to walk. How often they fall. Sometimes they bang their head. But one thing is certain . . . they keep getting up. We need that same kind of focus as we learn to walk by faith. There will be falls. There will be times of frustration . . . but keep getting up!

When you have drifted, come back to the Lord (See Backsliding). When you have sinned, confess it. When you have fallen, get back up . . . and begin again. The holy life is worth pursuing with every ounce of strength we have.

It is my hope this morning that you are encouraged by this story of Abraham. I hope you have seen that you are not alone. Abraham struggled. We all struggle. It's a part of the journey. Once we gain victory in one area of our lives, God shows us another to begin working on. Spiritual growth begins when we are humble enough to acknowledge our need for growth. So, it's time to drop the pretense. It's time to stop pretending. It's time to work together to become the people God has called us to be. It is a lifetime pursuit. It won't always be easy. But it will indeed be worth the effort.

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## Walter Kaiser - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#) - Sarai Is My Sister?

This incident is puzzling not only because of the subterfuge involved but also because the same kind of episode occurs three times (Ge 12:11-13 and in Gen 20:1–3; 26:7–11). In all three episodes the plot is essentially the same. A patriarch visits a foreign land, accompanied by his wife. Fearing that his wife's beauty will become a source of danger to himself, he resorts to the subterfuge of pretending that his wife is his sister.

The recurrent wife-sister theme in Genesis has provoked an unusual number of comments and speculative solutions. Interpreters have been puzzled about why father and son should have fallen back on this ploy so frequently.

The old explanation, the documentary source hypothesis, was that there was a single story told in different parts of the country at different times with different heroes. When these various traditions were welded together, the rough edges of the original sources were left for more intelligent moderns to detect. Hence Genesis 12:10–20 came from the Yahwistic writer of the "J" document, offering a Judean or southern viewpoint, and a written source coming from around 850 B.C. The Isaac parallel likewise came from the "J" document, but it featured another protagonist, Isaac. Genesis 20:1–18 was attributed to the "E" document, since it favored a northern or Ephraimite viewpoint and was committed to writing about a century later than "J."

Even though critical scholars concerned themselves with determining which story was the original and how the others developed from it, there is no compelling reason to doubt that all three incidents occurred. But why did the writer find it necessary to include all three stories?

Such an attitude betrays a lack of feeling for Hebrew rhetoric, in which repetition was a favorite device. Yet more is at work here. The two protagonists of these stories, Abram—or as he was later renamed, Abraham—and Isaac, were at the center of the promise-plan by which God was going to bless the very nations they were coming in contact with. Moreover, the means by which God was going to bless these Gentile nations was to be carried in the womb of the very woman to whom these potentates were being attracted. Each of these stories, then, sets up a moment of real suspense for divine providence and for the patriarchs, who, in spite of all their blundering, lying and mismanagement, were still the means through whom God was going to bless the world.

It must be stated clearly that Abraham and Isaac both practiced deception. The Bible merely reports that they did so, without approving of it. God preserved the purity of Sarai and Rebekah in spite of all the maneuverings of their husbands. No one can make a case for lying based on these passages. It will always be wrong to lie, since God is truth.

What about half lies? Wasn't it true that Sarai was Abraham's half sister? Was it not also true that the Hurrian society, in such centers as Haran, where Abraham had stayed on his way to Canaan, had a special legal fiction in which the bonds of marriage were strengthened when the groom adopted his wife as his "sister" in a legal document parallel to the marriage contract?

Yes, both are true. Sarai was Abraham's half sister (Gen 11:29). And there was the Hurrian legal form of sister-marriage. However, most scholars have now concluded that there is very little basis for assuming that Abraham had such a document in mind, since the details of patriarchal and Hurrian marriage documents are quite different.

What, then, was Abraham's motivation? Was he willing to sacrifice his wife's honor and allow her to marry any suitor in order to save his own skin and possibly get some financial gain? Though Genesis 12:13 might appear to support such an interpretation, subsequent events (Gen 12:15–16) provide a basis for questioning its correctness. Oriental attitudes toward adultery were much more sensitive than ours (Gen 20:2–9). It is doubtful that Abraham would have allowed his wife to bear that sin on her conscience, much less allow himself to be an accomplice in it.

The medieval commentators suggested that what Abraham hoped to get out of his "brother" status was the right to receive and deny all suitors' requests to be Sarai's husband. This suggestion works in those stories where brothers attempt to delay their sister's marriage (Laban and Rebekah in Gen 24:55, and Dinah and her brothers in Gen 34:13–17).

Abraham and Isaac are to be condemned for their complicity in lying, no matter how noble a motive they may have had, or how much truth the lie contained. Still, God was not to be deterred in his plan to bring life and blessing to the nations through the offspring of Sarai and Rebekah.

See also comment on EXODUS 1:15–21; 3:18.

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## Norman Geisler - [When Critics Ask](#) - GENESIS 12:10–20; 20:1–18—Why did God let Abraham prosper by lying?

**PROBLEM:** We are told in the Bible not to lie (Ex. 20:16), but, when Abraham lied about Sarah, his wealth was increased.

**SOLUTION:** First, Abraham's increase in wealth should not be viewed as a divine reward for his lie. Pharaoh's gifts to him were

understandable. Pharaoh may have felt obligated to pay amends for the wicked constraint that his corrupt society put on strangers who visited his land.

Furthermore, Pharaoh may have felt he had to make amends to Abraham for unwittingly taking his wife into his palace. Adultery was strictly forbidden by the Egyptian religion.

What is more, Abraham paid for his sin. The years of trouble that followed may have been a direct result of his lack of faith in God's protecting power.

Finally, although some people are portrayed as men of God, they are still fallible and responsible for their own sin (e.g., David and Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 12). God blessed them in spite of, not because of, their sins.

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### **Gleason Archer - How could God allow Abraham to enrich himself through lying? - [Bible Difficulties](#)**

On two occasions (Gen. 12:10–20; Gen. 20:1–18), Abraham passed off his wife Sarah as his sister in order to save himself from getting killed. The first time he did so was when famine afflicted Canaan so severely that he felt he had to move to Egypt to survive (Gen 12:10). But as he approached that corrupt pagan land, he realized he would be at the mercy of a society that would not stop at murder to seize his beautiful wife for the king's harem. Abraham felt sure they would kill him if they knew the truth about his marital status. He therefore persuaded Sarah herself to join with him in the lie, feeling that this was the only way his life could be spared. It was understandable enough that she complied with his request under those circumstances. Yet it was a sin on the part of both of them, and it robbed them of all possibility of witnessing to the truth of God before the idolatrous society of Egypt.

Pharaoh's agents did as Abraham had foreseen; they took Sarah to Pharaoh as a lovely addition to his harem (she was still beautiful after sixty-five!). But to Abraham's embarrassment the king bestowed lavish gifts on him and greatly increased his wealth—in servants, livestock, silver, and gold (Gen. 12:16; 13:2). Even after Pharaoh was stricken with a sudden illness, as soon as Sarah entered his palace, and he was constrained to inquire of his soothsayers the reason for his affliction, he was restrained from exacting vengeance on Abraham for his deception. Perhaps Pharaoh understood the constraint that his visitor was under because of the likelihood of his being murdered for the sake of his wife. Pharaoh was also very uncomfortable about being involved in the sin of adultery—which was sternly forbidden even by the Egyptian religion (cf. Book of the Dead, chap. 125, sec. B19, in Pritchard, ANET, p. 35, where the deceased has to aver that he has never committed adultery). Pharaoh was awed by the power of Abraham's God, who could smite him so quickly that he could not take Sarah to his bed before he fell deathly sick. For these reasons he allowed Abraham to leave Egypt with all the handsome dowry he had bestowed on him as Sarah's guardian.

It seems quite clear that this account of Abraham's failure is an honest inclusion of his lack of faith as manifested by this entire episode. If he had not believed that Yahweh was able to protect him with honor and integrity if he went down to Egypt, then he should never have gone there at all. As it was, he brought dishonor on himself and the cause he stood for, discrediting himself before the moral standards of Egypt itself. As for his enrichment through Pharaoh's generosity, there was a very definite sense in which the king was under obligation to pay amends for the wicked constraint that his corrupt society put on strangers who visited his land. When he found out the truth, he had to admit that Abraham had acted logically when he lied himself out of peril. Therefore it hardly follows that God was responsible for Abraham's increase in wealth; it was Pharaoh's own doing, and he did not feel justified in demanding it back, even after he found out the truth. Abraham retained his added possessions as he returned to Canaan, the land God had promised to him. But it may well be that the subsequent years of agonizing delay (twenty or more until he was one hundred years old) were due in part to his failure and lack of faith in God's protecting power, both in Egypt and (later on) in Gerar.

Genesis 20 tells us how readily Abraham fell into the same subterfuge in Gerar, when he once again feared for his safety on account of his wife. As he later explained to Abimelech of Gerar, "I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife" (Gen. 20:11, NASB). He then went on to explain that in point of fact Sarah was his half sister (v.12), even though she lived with him as his wife. But here again Abraham showed a lack of confidence in God's power to preserve him from mortal danger and failed to uphold God's honor before the eyes of the unbelieving world. Even though he was given a thousand shekels by way of atonement for Abimelech's having taken Sarah into his palace, Abraham had to leave under a cloud of dishonor. Again we should observe that this account no more exonerates Abraham from his sin than did the similar adventure in Egypt. He came away from both failures with dishonor and shame, and his influence on the Philistines was as nullified as it had been in the case of the Egyptians.

**Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.'**

- a dream: Ge 28:12 31:24 37:5,9 40:8 41:1-36 Job 4:12,13 33:15 Mt 1:20 Mt 2:12,13 27:19
- a dead: Ge 20:7 Ps 105:14 Eze 33:14,15 Jon 3:4
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## GOD GIVES ABIMELECH A STRONG WARNING

Now we see an interesting dialogue between God and Abimelech. One could subtitle this section **'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'** (Ro 5:20KJV+). Abraham's sin is abounding, but God steps in and His grace superabounds and supervenes to avert a disastrous scenario!

**But God** - Why is this such a critical **"but God?"** Because if Sarah is taken into Abimelech's harem and has an heir the following year (God keeps His promises!), the heir is in danger of being reckoned as Abimelech's heir and not Abraham's heir and the Messianic line is potentially corrupted! Below are all 41 uses of this gracious reversal of direction, some (e.g., Eph 2:4) of greater import than others (take a moment and ponder a few of these great uses of **"but God"**)...

Gen. 8:1; Gen. 17:19; Gen. 20:3; Gen. 21:12; Gen. 45:8; Gen. 48:21; Gen. 50:20; Gen. 50:24; Exod. 21:13; Num. 22:22; Jdg. 15:19; 1 Sam. 23:14; 1 Chr. 28:3; Job 34:5; Ps. 49:15; Ps. 52:5; Ps. 64:7; Ps. 73:26; Ps. 75:7; Jon. 4:7; Mk. 2:7; Lk. 5:21; Lk. 12:20; Lk. 16:15; Acts 2:24; Acts 7:6; Acts 7:42; Acts 13:30; Rom. 5:8; 1 Co. 1:27; 1 Co. 3:6; 1 Co. 3:7; 1 Co. 6:13; 1 Co. 7:15; 1 Co. 12:24; 1 Co. 15:38; 2 Co. 7:6; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 2:4; Phil. 2:27; 1 Thess. 2:4

**But God (Elohim) came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married - Abimelech** is a title for the leader of a country, such as Pharaoh, Caesar, or Czar. Note the **Behold (hinneh)** which is used to get the hearer's full attention! Indeed, this was a **dream** (a nightmare) that would get Abimelech's full attention! Note God does not say you will be but that **you are a dead man**, which is an even stronger way to state it! This warning reminds me of Heb 10:31 which says "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." **God (Elohim)** speaks of God's sovereignty over these events. Hebrew reads "and she is owned by an owner." God intervenes to preserve Sarah, for she was to be the mother of the promised child to Abraham. God informs Abimelech that Sarah who he had taken into his harem was a married woman and therefore he would be guilty of adultery and deserving of death.

This is no difference in the Death Sentence God delivered to Abimelech and that He delivered to the Adam and Eve in the Garden – "you shall surely die" (Ge 2:17; 3:3) God's word of course was denied by Satan – "You surely will not die!" (Ge 3:4) which was a direct contradiction and outright lie from the father of lies (Jn 8:44). God repeatedly warns that the penalty for sin is death -- "the soul that sinneth it shall surely die" (Ezek. 18:20), "the wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23)

Does it strike you as a bit odd that God appeared to a pagan king and not to Abraham to address his sin? [Steven Cole](#) has a thought- I think the reason is that God sometimes allows us to fail to teach us that our salvation depends totally on His sovereign grace, and not at all on ourselves. This event took place on the verge of Sarah's becoming pregnant with Isaac. That couldn't have happened if she was in Abimelech's harem. In his attempt to protect himself, Abraham almost spoiled God's promise to give him a son through Sarah the next year (Ge 18:10). This serious failure, right on the verge of the promise's fulfillment, showed Abraham again that if God's promise was to be fulfilled, it would be totally because of God and not at all because of Abraham.

[Jack Arnold](#) - How wonderful is the sovereignty of God, for He can and does intervene into the affairs of men, even the unsaved, to accomplish his purposes. While Abimelech did not touch Sarah, it was God who actually withheld him from sinning. POINT: Those who speak of man's absolute freedom must never read the Bible. Those who say that puny man can defy the secret counsels of God leave God out of the picture. For many, God is reduced to a mere spectator, full of gracious intentions but lacking in power to do anything. How sad to believe in a God who is less than a man.

[The Believer's Study Bible](#) - The warning of God to Abimelech concerning the deceit of Abraham further indicates the mercy of God toward all people. The two incidents in which Abraham used the same lie under similar circumstances (12:10-20) make the deed doubly reprehensible. After Yahweh's explanation, Abimelech would deserve any punishment, for he now knew that Sarah was the wife of Abraham, "a prophet" (v. 7).

[Bruce Goettsche](#) - God's Grace is Greater than our Weakness (2Cor 12:9-10). In the midst of Abraham's sin, we see that God is still watching out for him. He protects Sarah, he protects Abraham and even puts Abraham in a position to bless Abimelech. God forgave Abraham in spite of his repeated sin. This is not to say that there weren't consequences. There were and always are. But the point we need to see is that God did not throw up His hands and walk away from Abraham. He won't walk away from us either. God wants us to overcome our failures and weaknesses. He has promised He would help us. But God knows that growth takes time. Martyn Lloyd Jones says that we don't have to be discouraged . . . in fact we can be hopeful. He writes,



I lose my [sense of hopelessness](#) because I can say to myself that not only am I no longer under the dominion of sin, but I am under the dominion of another power that nothing can frustrate. However weak I may be, it is the power of God that is working in me; and it is God's purpose to deliver me from every vestige and trace and remnant of sin, until I become faultless and blameless. There is a power working in me which is against sin and sin's power. I have been taken out of the realm of sin and I am being purged and purified, God is working in me. However great the power of the devil may be, I know that this power is greater: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4) When I say that, and believe it, I can smile at the devil, I can defy, I can resist him and see him fleeing from me. I can resist him, 'steadfast in the faith'. I used to be terrified of him, but no longer! Oh yes, If I were still alone I should be terrified; but Christ is with me, I am in Him. Therefore I need fear nothing that the devil can do to me. I can defy him, though he is a 'a roaring lion roaming about seeking whom he may devour.' In Christ I can resist him. [Lloyd Jones A NEW MAN p. 143, 144]

Even in our failure we have the assurance that God is at work in our lives if we belong to Him. God will continue the work of freeing us from the power of sin just as He has delivered us from the penalty of sin. Don't give up my friend! Keep working . . . keep resisting. When you fall, get up again. The Lord is at work in the lives of everyone who trusts Him.

**THOUGHT** - Perhaps you like Abraham are prone to take some side trips from "Mamre to Gerar" (so to speak). Let's be honest. Most of us have made this trip from time to time, and even if you have not, you still have this propensity, because it is in the "DNA" of our fallen flesh to take "side trips!" That said, let me recommend a little book (which can be borrowed) by Jerry Bridges by the title of [The Chase: Pursuing Holiness in your Everyday Life](#), which is a contemporary adaptation of the NavPress classic "The Pursuit of Holiness," especially the chapter entitled "[Help in the Daily Battle](#)." I would also highly recommend borrowing his classic "[The Pursuit of Holiness](#)." You won't be disappointed, but you will be challenged! May God grant us all, by His Spirit and Word, the power to "**Pursue** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) peace with all men, and the sanctification (holiness) without which no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14+)

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**Ken Hemphill - BUT GOD Steps Into Our Situation** (His book is highly recommended - But God - [borrow here](#))

Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night.

Have you ever found yourself on the verge of spiritual victory only to be defeated by a familiar enemy? If so, you may identify with this story, rejoicing in the assurance of God's protective care.

Abraham had been steadily learning to trust God as the provision for his life. But even after the moving story of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, when he pled for the city's survival (if only ten righteous people, his nephew Lot among them, could be found there), we are disappointed to find very soon thereafter that he resorted to faithless scheming. While traveling through the Negev and settling between Kadesh and Shur, he tried passing off his wife, Sarah, as his sister.

Abraham explained his action: "I thought, 'There is absolutely no fear of God in this place. They will kill me because of my wife'" (v. 11). Further, he attempted to rationalize his action by claiming that she really was his sister — sort of—the daughter of his father (v. 12). Once again, however, we are reminded of God's grace in the everyday affairs of men. "But God came to Abimelech [the local king] in a dream," setting into motion a series of events that spared Abraham from paying as dearly as he could for his folly.

I find it helpful to read stories like this. They are not glamorous and do not paint Abraham in a very good light, but they are honest. Like Abraham, we often find ourselves falling back into familiar patterns of bad behavior that have been our crutches in the past — even after times of great spiritual victory and advance.

This story should remind us that God is our ultimate and only protection. How arrogant of Abraham to think that his half-truth would provide greater safety for him and his family than the sovereign God of the universe could. When you are tempted to rely on your own ingenuity, remember that God's power is not lessened by the circumstances in which you are living. His Word can always be trusted

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**QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about nightmares / bad dreams?](#) [WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - Nightmares are defined as dreams that produce a strong negative emotional response, such as fear or horror. Nightmare sufferers usually awake in a state of extreme distress, even to the point of a severe physical response—racing pulse, sweating, nausea—and they often are unable to go back to sleep for some time. The causes of nightmares are varied. Children, because of their active imaginations, are prone to nightmares, some so severe that they wake up screaming and crying. Extreme incidents of these are also referred to as "night terrors." Eating certain foods too close to bedtime can trigger a nightmare, as can viewing scary

movies. Going to bed distressed about life's circumstances or after a fight or argument can also cause nightmares because of the brain's continued activity during sleep.

There is no doubt that nightmares can be extremely disturbing, but is there any spiritual significance to nightmares? Dreams and visions are mentioned in the Bible, and God sometimes used the dream state to communicate with His prophets and others. **God spoke to Abimelech in Genesis 20, warning him not to touch Abraham's wife, Sarah.** Other dreams include Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28), Joseph's dream that his brothers would serve him that led to his captivity in Egypt (Genesis 37), as well as his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams (Genesis 40-41) that led to his being made the second most powerful man in Egypt. The Lord or His angel appeared to others in the Bible, including Solomon (1 Kings 3), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), Joseph (Matthew 2), and Pilate's wife (Matthew 27). None of these dreams, however, with the possible exception of Pilate's wife's dream, can really be called a nightmare. So it would appear that God does not usually speak to people through nightmares.

Some people think Satan or demons are infiltrating their minds during nightmares, but there is no passage in the Bible to directly substantiate this. With the possible exception of a dream Eliphaz claimed to have, there are no biblical incidents of demonic forces communicating with people during dreams or nightmares. Most likely, nightmares are nothing more than the brain's way of contending with our fears and concerns as it continues to function during sleep cycles. If a Christian experiences continual, frequent nightmares that are interrupting sleep and causing emotional disturbance on a regular basis, perhaps medical help is in order. But, as in all things, prayer is our most potent weapon against any kind of emotional or spiritual distress. Praying for fifteen or twenty minutes prior to sleep is the most effective way to calm the mind and heart and prepare for restful sleep. As in all things, God grants wisdom to those who seek it from Him (James 1:5), and He has also promised His peace to all who seek it. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6–7). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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#### **Question - [How did God use dreams and visions in the Bible?](#)**

**Answer** - God used dreams and visions (visions are "waking dreams"; see Numbers 24:4) several times in the Bible to communicate with people. Visions seem to have been common enough that their lack was sorely noted. An absence of visions was due at times to a dearth of prophets (1 Samuel 3:1) and other times due to the disobedience of God's people (1 Samuel 28:6).

#### **Old Testament Dreams and Visions**

God used visions in the Old Testament to reveal His plan, to further His plan, and to put His people in places of influence.

*Abraham* (Genesis 15:1): God used a vision to restate the [Abrahamic Covenant](#), reminding Abram that he would have a son and be the father of many nations.

*Abimelech* (Genesis 20:1-7): Abraham's wife, Sarah, was beautiful—so beautiful that when Abraham came into a new area he occasionally feared that the local ruler would kill him and take Sarah for himself. Abraham told Abimelech king of Gerar that Sarah was his sister (she was his half-sister). Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but God sent him a dream telling him not to touch Sarah because she was Abraham's wife. The king returned Sarah to her husband the next morning; the dream had protected Sarah and safeguarded God's plan for Sarah to be the mother of His chosen people.

*Jacob* (Genesis 28:10-17): Jacob, with his mother's help, stole Esau's firstborn inheritance. Jacob then fled Esau's anger, and on his journey he had his famous dream of a ladder reaching to heaven on which angels ascended and descended. In this dream Jacob received God's promise that Abraham's blessing would be carried on through him.

*Joseph* (Genesis 37:1-11): Joseph is one of the most famous dreamers, and one of the most famous dream-interpreters, in the Bible. His first recorded dreams are found in Genesis 37. They showed through easily deciphered symbols that Joseph's family would one day bow to him in respect. His brothers didn't appreciate the dream and in their hatred sold Joseph into slavery. Eventually, Joseph ended up in prison in Egypt.

*Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker* (Genesis 40): While in prison Joseph interpreted some dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. With God's guidance, he explained that the cupbearer would return to Pharaoh's service, but the baker would be killed.

*Pharaoh* (Genesis 41): Two years later, Pharaoh himself had a dream which Joseph interpreted. God's purpose was to raise Joseph to second-in-command over Egypt and to save the Egyptians and the Israelites from a horrible famine.

*Samuel* (1 Samuel 3): Samuel had his first vision as a young boy. God told him that judgment was coming upon the sons of Samuel's mentor, Eli. The young Samuel was faithful to relay the information, and God continued to speak to Samuel through the rest of his life.

*The Midianite and Amalekite armies* (Judges 7:12-15): The pagan enemies of Israel had a divinely inspired dream. God told Gideon

to sneak into the enemy camp at night, and there in the outposts of the camp, Gideon overheard an enemy soldier relate a dream he had just had. The interpretation, from another enemy soldier, mentioned Gideon by name and predicted that Israel would win the battle. Gideon was greatly encouraged by this revelation.

*Solomon* (1 Kings 3:5): It was in a dream that God gave Solomon the famous offer: "Ask what you wish Me to give you." Solomon chose wisdom.

*Daniel* (Daniel 2; 4): As He had done for Joseph, God placed Daniel in a position of power and influence by allowing him to interpret a foreign ruler's dream. This is consistent with God's propensity to use miracles to identify His messengers. Daniel himself had many dreams and visions, mostly related to future kingdoms of the world and the nation of Israel.

### **New Testament Dreams and Visions**

Visions in the New Testament also served to provide information that was unavailable elsewhere. Specifically, God used visions and dreams to identify Jesus and to establish His church.

*Zacharias* (Luke 1:5-23): God used a vision to tell Zacharias, an old priest, that he would soon have an important son. Not long after, Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth, had John the Baptist.

*Joseph* (Matthew 1:20; 2:13): Joseph would have divorced Mary when he found out she was pregnant, but God sent an angel to him in a dream, convincing him that the pregnancy was of God. Joseph went ahead with the marriage. After Jesus was born, God sent two more dreams, one to tell Joseph to take his family to Egypt so Herod could not kill Jesus and another to tell him Herod was dead and that he could return home.

*Pilate's wife* (Matthew 27:19): During Jesus' trial, Pilate's wife sent an urgent message to the governor encouraging him to free Jesus. Her message was prompted by a dream she had—a nightmare, really—that convinced her that Jesus was innocent and that Pilate should have nothing to do with His case.

*Ananias* (Acts 9:10): It would have taken nothing less than a vision from God to convince Ananias, a Christian in Damascus, to visit Paul, the persecutor of Christians. But because Ananias was obedient to God's leading, Paul regained his sight and found the truth about those he was trying to kill.

*Cornelius* (Acts 10:1-6): God spoke to an Italian centurion named Cornelius who feared the God of the Jews. In his vision, Cornelius saw an angel who told him where to find Simon Peter and to send for him and listen to his message. Cornelius obeyed the vision, Peter came and preached, and Cornelius and his household full of Gentiles were saved by the grace of God.

*Peter* (Acts 10:9-15): While Peter was praying on the rooftop of a house in Joppa, God gave him a vision of animals lowered in something like a sheet. A voice from heaven told Peter to kill the animals (some of which were unclean) and eat them. The vision served to show that Christians are not bound by kosher law and that God had pronounced Gentiles "clean"; that is, heaven is open to all who follow Jesus.

*Paul*: Paul had several visions in his missionary career. One sent him to preach in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Another encouraged him to keep preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11). God also gave him a vision of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-6).

*John* (Revelation): Nearly the entire book of Revelation is a vision John had while exiled on the island of Patmos. John's vision explains in more detail some of the events that God had shown Daniel.

### **Today's Dreams and Visions**

With the completion of the Bible, God does not have to use dreams and visions as much as He did before. That is not to say that He cannot or does not; God can communicate with us however He chooses. But when we have a decision to make, our first stop should always be the Bible, not a dream. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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### **Matthew Henry Notes: Ge 20:3-7**

It appears by this that God revealed himself by dreams (which evidenced themselves to be divine and supernatural) not only to his servants the prophets, but even to those who were out of the pale of the church and covenant; but then, usually, it was with some regard to God's own people as in Pharaoh's dream, to Joseph, in Nebuchadnezzar's, to Daniel, and here, in Abimelech's, to Abraham and Sarah, for he reproved this king for their sake, Ps. 105:14, 15.

**I. God gives him notice of his danger** (Ge 20:3), his danger of sin, telling him that the woman is a man's wife, so that if he take her he will wrong her husband; his danger of death for this sin: Thou art a dead man; and God's saying so of a man makes him so. Note, Every wilful sinner ought to be told that he is a dead man, as the condemned malefactor, and the patient whose disease is

mortal, are said to be so. If thou art a bad man, certainly thou art a dead man.

**II. He pleads ignorance that Abraham and Sarah had agreed to impose upon him**, and not to let him know that they were any more than brother and sister, Ge 20:6. See what confidence a man may have towards God when his heart condemns him not, 1 Jn. 3:21. If our consciences witness to our integrity, and that, however we may have been cheated into a snare, we have not knowingly and wittingly sinned against God, it will be our rejoicing in the day of evil. He pleads with God as Abraham had done, Ge 18:23. Wilt thou slay a righteous nation? Ge 20:4. Not such a nation as Sodom, which was indeed justly destroyed, but a nation which, in this matter, was innocent.

### **III. God gives a very full answer to what he had said.**

**1. He allows his plea, and admits that what he did he did in the integrity of his heart** Yea, I know it, Ge 20:6. Note, It is matter of comfort to those that are honest that God knows their honesty, and will acknowledge it, though perhaps men that are prejudiced against them either cannot be convinced of it or will not own that they are.

**2. He lets him know that he was kept from proceeding in the sin merely by the good hand of God upon him:** I withheld thee from sinning against me. Abimelech was hereby kept from doing wrong, Abraham from suffering wrong, and Sarah from both. Note,

(1.) There is a great deal of sin devised and designed that is never executed. As bad as things are in the world, they are not so bad as the devil and wicked men would have them.

(2.) It is God that restrains men from doing the ill they would do. It is not from him that there is sin, but it is from him that there is not more sin, either by his influence upon men's minds, checking their inclination to sin, or by his providence, taking away the opportunity to sin.

(3.) It is a great mercy to be hindered from committing sin; of this God must have the glory, whoever is the instrument, 1 Sa. 25:32, 33.

**3. He charges him to make restitution:** Now therefore, not that thou art better informed, restore the man his wife, Ge 20:7. Note, Ignorance will excuse no longer than it continues. If we have entered upon a wrong course through ignorance this will not excuse our knowingly persisting in it, Lev. 5:3-5. The reasons why he must be just and kind to Abraham are,

(1.) Because he is a prophet, near and dear to God, for whom God does in a particular manner concern himself. God highly resents the injuries done to his prophets, and takes them as done to himself.

(2.) Being a prophet, he shall pray for thee; this is a prophet's reward, and a good reward it is. It is intimated that there was great efficacy in the prayers of a prophet, and that good men should be ready to help those with their prayers that stand in need of them, and should make, at least, this return for the kindnesses that are done them. Abraham was accessory to Abimelech's trouble, and therefore was obliged in justice to pray for him.

(3.) It is at thy peril if thou do not restore her: Know thou that thou shalt surely die. Note, He that does wrong, whoever he is, prince or peasant, shall certainly receive for the wrong which he has done, unless he repent and make restitution, Col. 3:25. No injustice can be made passable with God, no, not by Caesar's image stamped upon it.

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### **BUT GOD Steps Into Our Situation**

Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night.

Have you ever found yourself on the verge of spiritual victory only to be defeated by a familiar enemy? If so, you may identify with this story, rejoicing in the assurance of God's protective care.

Abraham had been steadily learning to trust God as the provision for his life. But even after the moving story of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, when he pled for the city's survival (if only ten righteous people, his nephew Lot among them, could be found there), we are disappointed to find very soon thereafter that he resorted to faithless scheming. While traveling through the Negev and settling between Kadesh and Shur, he tried passing off his wife, Sarah, as his sister.

Abraham explained his action: "I thought, 'There is absolutely no fear of God in this place. They will kill me because of my wife'" (v. 11). Further, he attempted to rationalize his action by claiming that she really was his sister — sort of—the daughter of his father (v. 12). Once again, however, we are reminded of God's grace in the everyday affairs of men. "But God came to Abimelech [the local

king] in a dream,” setting into motion a series of events that spared Abraham from paying as dearly as he could for his folly.

I find it helpful to read stories like this. They are not glamorous and do not paint Abraham in a very good light, but they are honest. Like Abraham, we often find ourselves falling back into familiar patterns of bad behavior that have been our crutches in the past — even after times of great spiritual victory and advance.

This story should remind us that God is our ultimate and only protection. How arrogant of Abraham to think that his half-truth would provide greater safety for him and his family than the sovereign God of the universe could. When you are tempted to rely on your own ingenuity, remember that God's power is not lessened by the circumstances in which you are living. His Word can always be trusted. (from [But God by Ken Hemphill](#))

**Genesis 20:4 Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless?”**

- had: Ge 20:6,18
- wilt: Ge 20:17,18 18:23-25 19:24 2Sa 4:11 1Ch 21:17
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### ABIMELECH'S RESPONSE TO GOD

**Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord ([adonay](#); Lxx = [kurios](#)), will You slay a nation, even though blameless ([saddiq](#))?”** - He denies any offense and even uses the name **Lord** which is interesting. The phrase **had not come near her** is saying he did not have sex with Sarah. Notice in his question **'will You slay a nation,'** Abimelech seems to assume that God's judgment will fall on his entire nation. This recalls Abraham's question of God regarding the people of Sodom in Ge 18:23 *“Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”* The Hebrew for **blameless ([saddiq](#))** is used over 200x and is most often translated “righteous.”

**[Bruce Goettsche](#)** - If you were reading this story of Abraham and Abimelech for the very first time with no background knowledge of the men involved, which would you think was the righteous man? Probably Abimelech! Abimelech pleads with the Lord! (ED: WHILE ABRAHAM IS NOT WILLING TO TRUST THE LORD TO PROTECT SARAH!) Let us not make any mistake here . . . when we fall (especially in an area where we have fallen before) there is often a price to pay. Look at the consequences of Abraham's repeated sin. (1) Damage to his character. Abraham was caught in a lie. This would make it tougher to trust his word in the future. His character and integrity took a hit when he lied to the King. Integrity takes years to establish and only a moment to destroy. (2) Damage to his Testimony. Abraham compromised his ability to testify and minister in Gerar. He was supposed to bring blessing to the world . . . but here he is bringing judgment on them. (3) Damage to his relationship with Sarah. I mentioned this in Genesis 12. What message does Abraham send to Sarah as he willingly lets her go to the home of another man . . . knowing full well what the man's intentions are? Sin brings negative consequences. Some are external, some are internal. Some are public, some are private. God does not allow His children to sin without consequence.

**NET NOTE** Apparently Abimelech assumes that God's judgment will fall on his entire nation. Some, finding the reference to a nation problematic, prefer to emend the text and read, “Would you really kill someone who is innocent?” See E. A. Speiser, Genesis (AB), 149.

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**Adonai (0136) 'adonay 'ādōn. Lord, Lord, Lord, master, owner.** No doubt exists about the meaning of this word. The Ugaritic *adn* means “lord” or “father” and the Akkadian *adannu* carries a similar meaning, “mighty.”

In the simple unsuffixed form or when pointed *ādōnî*, or *ādōna(y)*, for the first common singular suffix or with other pronominal suffixes, *ādōn* usually refers to men. Sarah used it in reference to her husband (Genesis 18:12), Lot used it in addressing the angelic visitors (Genesis 19:2). Abraham's servant repeatedly called his master by it in Genesis 24. The pharaoh of Egypt was called by this title (Genesis 40:1), as well as Joseph his “vizier” (Genesis 42:10). Ruth used it of Boaz before they were married (Ruth 2:13). Hannah addressed Eli the priest by this term (1 Samuel 1:15). Saul's servants called him by the title as well (1 Samuel 16:16). Likewise, officers less than the king, such as Joab, had this appellation (2 Samuel 11:9). In 1 Kings 16:24 there is the unique reading “Shemer, 'owner' of the hill, Samaria.” The prophet Elijah bore the title “lord” (1 Kings 18:7).

However, there are numerous passages, particularly in Psalms, where these forms, which are the only ones to apply to men, refer to God. Exodus 34:23 combines “the Lord, YHWH, the God of Israel” (*hā'ādōn yhw' 'ēlōhē yisrā'el*). Deut. 10:17 uses both the singular and plural in the construction “Lord of lords” (*'ādōnē hā'ādōnīm*;



cf. Psalm 136:3). In Psalm 8:1 [H 2] God has the title "YHWH our Lord" (yhwh ădônênu). The Messiah bears this title in Psalm 110:1. (Harris, R L, Archer, G L & Waltke, B K Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. online [TWOT](#))

**Genesis 20:5 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."**

- **in the integrity:** Jos 22:22 1Ki 9:4 2Ki 20:3 1Ch 29:17 Ps 7:8 25:21 78:72 Pr 11:3 20:7 2Co 1:12 1Th 2:10 1Ti 1:13
- **innocence:** Job 33:9 Ps 24:4 26:6 73:13 Da 6:22
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### **Related Passages:**

1 Chronicles 29:17 "Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, **in the integrity of my heart**, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You.

Psalm 101:2 I will give heed to the blameless way. When will You come to me? I will walk within my house in **the integrity of my heart**.

### **ABIMELECH'S DEFENSE**

**Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity([tom](#)) of my heart ([lebab](#)) and the innocence of my hands I have done this."** - Abimelech's defense before God is two-fold (1) that he was misled and misinformed and (2) that he acted in good conscience. The idea of **integrity ([tom](#))** is completeness and here refers to his heart, which would say he has nothing to hide in his heart, that his heart is undivided regarding this issue.

**Bob Utley** - The metaphor in Gen. 20:5, "**innocence of my hands**"), refers to a Hebrew idiom of open-handedness, i.e., "nothing to hide." It is parallel with "in the integrity of my heart" (cf. 1 Kgs. 9:4; Ps. 7:8; 101:2). In Gen. 20:6 God said that He kept him from sinning (cf. 1 Sam. 25:39; Job 33:18; also note Ps. 19:13).

**Krell** has an interesting point - Some have suggested that Sarah was not responsible for this sin since she was being submissive to Abraham. However, submission has its limits—we must always obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). In the biblical chain-of-command, God's revealed will is supreme, and it overrules all other levels of authority if they are in direct conflict with God's Word. So Sarah is guilty of disobeying God.<sup>15</sup> When we obey our spouse or employer in violation of God's Word, we are guilty of disobedience.

**Rod Mattoon** - What is integrity? We hear this word used a lot and are told we should have it, but what is it? Webster defines it as soundness; adherence to a code of values; utter sincerity, honesty and candor. Integrity makes a man upright even when others are downright wrong. Integrity makes a man honest when others want him to be deceitful because he has a stubborn, steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code. Integrity compels a man to tell the truth, to be trustworthy and faithful even though others may lie, be undependable or unpredictable. A man or woman who has integrity has grit, guts, and steel for a backbone. People of integrity are not afraid to stand up for what is right, even when right may cause sorrow or sacrifice in their life. They are people of convictions. Integrity is to guide the life of the believer (Proverbs 11:3). Joseph's integrity guided his life when he was tempted and taunted by his brothers, sold into slavery, entrusted with the affairs of Potiphar's house, and tempted by Potiphar's wife. The person with integrity fulfills obligations whether they are required of him or not or when no one is around watching them. No matter how much time has elapsed, the person with integrity fulfills his word or promises. Integrity is far more valuable than wealth and riches (Proverbs 19:1; 16:7, 8; 22:1). It's ironic that people will cheat or be dishonest because they feel they will not get what eventually will not satisfy them. Our integrity is tested every day and there is no better test for our integrity than our behavior when we have made a mistake or been wrong. Will we make the matter right or rationalize our wrong?

**THOUGHT** - The question I pose to you is, "Do you have integrity?" If not, why not? Christianity today is suffering an integrity crisis in the pulpit and the pew. The testimony of Christ has been damaged by people who claim to be Christians, but have no integrity. Those without Christ mock and jeer our sinful, hypocritical, inconsistent lives. If Abraham had integrity in this situation, he would have never deceived Abimelech. Yet, Abraham did have integrity at other times in his life. ([Rod Mattoon](#))

**Comment** - Below are 2 excellent books you can borrow from archive.org that deal with integrity

- [The Integrity Crisis](#) by Warren Wiersbe
- [The Power of Integrity](#) : Building a Life Without Compromise by John MacArthur

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**Integrity** (08537)(tom) means completeness as it derives from tamam which means to be complete or finished. It means completeness in the following senses: fullness (Job 21:23), innocency or simplicity (2Sa 15:11), integrity (Ge 20:5).

**Gilbrant** - The most common translation of tōm by the KJV, "integrity," is still one of the best ways to understand the noun. The most frequent use refers to a person's integrity, often as "integrity of heart," meaning "sincerity" or perhaps "moral and wise character" (Gen. 20:5; Pss. 26:1; 78:72). It refers to innocence of willful wrongdoing and having a clear conscience in a relationship (2 Sam. 15:11). It seems to have a sense of consistent honesty and moral behavior, wholly desiring to live in complete harmony with God and others. Proverbs 10:29 uses tōm of a person who is literally "the one of integrity," which usually then is translated as "the upright" or "the righteous." The idea of innocence of willful wrongdoing probably led to the use for firing an arrow without aiming at the one it hit and thus the translation "randomly" (1 Ki. 22:34). One other use is found in Isa. 47:9 for the completeness or the fullness of certain judgments being executed to their full measure. It should be noted that in antiquity the word "Thummim" was understood as the plural of this Hebrew word. The Urim (possibly meaning "lights") and Thummim (possibly meaning "perfections") were objects God told the high priest to use to inquire of the will of God (Exo. 28:30). What they were, how they were used and what the names actually meant are still matters of speculation. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Tom - 23x/23v - blameless(1), full(1), full measure(1), innocently(1), integrity(16), random(2), upright(1).**  
Gen. 20:5; Gen. 20:6; 2Sa 15:11; 1Ki 9:4; 1Ki. 22:34; 2Chr. 18:33; Job 4:6; Job 21:23; Ps. 7:8; Ps. 25:21; Ps. 26:1; Ps. 26:11; Ps. 41:12; Ps. 78:72 = **"INTEGRITY OF HIS HEART"**; Ps. 101:2 = **IN THE INTEGRITY OF MY HEART**"; Prov. 2:7; Prov. 10:9; Prov. 10:29; Prov. 13:6; Prov. 19:1; Prov. 20:7; Prov. 28:6; Isa. 47:9

1 Kings 9:4 "As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in **integrity** of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances,

Psalm 7:8 The LORD judges the peoples; Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my **integrity** that is in me.

Psalm 25:21 Let **integrity** and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You.

Psalm 26:1 A Psalm of David. Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my **integrity**, And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

Psalm 26:11 But as for me, I shall walk in my **integrity**; Redeem me, and be gracious to me.

Psalm 41:12 As for me, You uphold me in my **integrity**, And You set me in Your presence forever.

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### Jon Courson - A MATTER OF INTEGRITY A Topical Study of GENESIS 20:6

America has at last "come of age." We have shaken off our Puritanical frontier past, for we have joined Europe in thinking that it doesn't matter what our leaders do in private as long as they are effective in their elected positions. **At the state funeral of France's President Francois Mitterand, his wife stood on one side of his casket, his mistress on the other side—a scene completely acceptable to the French populous.** What does it really matter, the Europeans ask, if a person has certain personal inconsistencies as long as he can function effectively in his position governmentally?

It does matter. Read your history books...

Joseph Stalin turned a backwater, third-world Russia into a force of great strength militarily and rising power economically. He made Russia a great nation. He got the economy rolling, the military growing—but at what cost? Twenty million Russians were sent to gulags or shot in the back.

Or how about the most efficient leader in European history—Adolf Hitler. "He may hate Jews, and he may have all kinds of quirks, but as long as he can build a Third Reich, he's our man," Germany declared.

Even if you don't believe the Bible, study what's happened in Europe over the last century, and ask if morals matter, if character counts, if integrity is an issue. The dictionary defines integrity as "an unimpaired condition or soundness; an adherence to a code of moral values; the quality or state of being complete or undivided, integrated." What is integrity? It's solidness, soundness, firmness.

**Why should we care about integrity?**

## **The Bible gives four reasons...**

### **Integrity Protects Us from Sin**

And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me... Genesis 20:6 (a)

If we choose to walk in integrity, to value honesty, God will protect us from sins which otherwise would have victory over us.

“What’s the big deal about sin?” you might be saying. “I can cover my tracks. I can deal with the repercussions.”

“Be sure your sin will find you out,” the Word declares (Numbers 32:23). Sin will bring you humiliation, consternation, and real depression. No one gets away with sin.

“But I thought Jesus died for our sin,” you say. “I thought our sin was washed away from the Father’s memory because of what Christ did on the Cross.”

That’s absolutely true. “Your sin and iniquity will I remember no more,” God declares (Hebrews 10:17). Every confessed sin you’ve ever done, are doing, or will do is forgiven and forgotten by God. You’re forgiven—but your sin itself will track you down, humiliate, and hurt you (Numbers 32:23). That is why integrity is so vital. It protects us from the destructiveness of sin.

### **Integrity Profits Our Children**

The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him. Proverbs 20:7

If you choose integrity, your children will be blessed. That is, they will be prosperous and happy. I know this to be true. My dad was not a powerful, flamboyant person, but he was one of the greatest men I have ever known. And the thing that characterized my dad was this word integrity...

For a season, our family car was a VW beetle. Our family of six traveling in our VW beetle—sometimes accompanied by our German Shepherd named Sam—was a sight to see. Then one day, my bank president dad came home with a brand new company car. I was so excited about the prospect of family trips in that 1966 blue Ford Fairlane—until I heard my dad say, “This car is meant to be used only to go to the bank.”

“Let’s take the Fairlane out for a spin,” I’d say.

“So, you want to go to the bank?” he’d reply.

You see, my dad was a man of real integrity, a man of his word. And his children have been abundantly blessed by his legacy.

### **Integrity Promotes Stability**

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. James 1:8

A man who lives in integrity is single-minded. His yea is yea, his nay, nay (Matthew 5:37). He is one who is emotionally solid. As a pastor, I’m convinced that many people are emotionally unstable and depressed because they’re double-minded. They’re like waves being tossed to and fro in the sea.

People who don’t have integrity are emotionally distraught, vulnerable to depression, and unstable internally because they don’t exactly know what story they told whom. He who lacks integrity forgets what truth is. His story shifts, and pretty soon, all he can say is, “No comment; talk to my lawyer.”

### **Integrity Provides Guidance and Direction**

The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. Proverbs 11:3

The best guidance system you’ll ever have is integrity. The Hebrew word translated “integrity” is tummah, from which comes the word “thummim.” In Old Testament days, when a person had a question—should he go there, attack them, do this—he would go to the High Priest who would consult the Urim and the Thummim. Urim means “lights.” Thummim means “perfection” or “direction.” The Urim and Thummim was part of the High Priest’s breastplate. It would seem to refer to the twelve gems on his breastplate—one for each tribe—which would light up in such a way as to spell an answer, each stone representing the first letter of its tribe.

The difference between the Old Testament believer who sought direction from the High Priest and the New Testament believer who seeks direction from a pastor or counselor is a big one, however, for the Old Testament believer had to follow the counsel of the High Priest, or die.

We live in a culture where there’s endless counseling and running to this guy and that meeting, trying to find what we want to hear. Integrity, on the other hand, says, “I’m coming to You, Lord. No games, no agenda. Whatever You say, I’ll do.”

“That’s integrity,” God says. “And I will definitely guide you.”

Integrity protects from sin, profits one's children, promotes stability, and provides guidance. How can we incorporate integrity into our own lives? I believe the answer can be seen in the life of Job...

"Do you still retain your integrity?" asked his wife. "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9).

Although his children, possessions, and health had all been decimated, Job answered, "I will not cave in on the issue of integrity."

His friends came to him, saying, you must be doing something wrong, Job.

"Even though you want me to confess to this stuff, even though that might sound humble and seem spiritual, it lacks integrity because what you are saying I have done is just not true. It might sound noble and humble and spiritual—but I must not compromise honesty and integrity," declared Job.

What made Job this way? What made Job a man about whom God would say to Satan, "Here's a man who will hold fast his integrity no matter what you do, no matter what happens"?

"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" Job declared (Job 31:1). "I made a decision about my life that I would not look at a woman lustfully. I drew a line in the sand, and made my stand." Such was Job's mentality. He wasn't making a deal with his Lord. He was making a decision about his life.

If someone offered me a bunch of heroin, I would have lots of options: I could call the cops, witness to him, or tell him to beat it. But partaking of his heroin would not be an option because somewhere along the way in my life I decided heroin is non-negotiable. When I finally, seriously decide that lying is not an option, that twisting the truth is non-negotiable—I will no longer be tempted to lie; I will walk in integrity. Whenever we make such a decision, God makes the provision which enables us to carry it out. That's what Job had done.

"But he lost everything," you say.

Not true. At the end of the story, Job had twice as much as he had originally.

When you make a decision to start living in integrity and honesty, God will bless you just as He blessed Job, just like He blessed Abimelech. Our culture is so confused on this issue. Let us go out and be salt and light. Let us choose to be people of integrity that we might see blessings in our lives personally, in our families, and in our country. (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Are You Entangled?](#)
- [Daniel-Man of Commitment](#)
- [Daniel-Man of Integrity](#)
- [Give Me An Undivided Heart](#)
- [Integrity - A Whole Heart](#)
- [Joshua-Portrait of the Man God Uses](#)

**Genesis 20:6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.**

- withheld: Ge 20:18 31:7 35:5 Ex 34:24 1Sa 25:26,34 Ps 84:11 Pr 21:1 Ho 2:6,7
- sinning: Ge 39:9 Lev 6:2 Ps 51:4 81:12 2Th 2:7,11
- to touch: Ge 3:3 26:11 1Co 7:1 2Co 6:17
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passage:

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

### GOD'S RESTRAINT VALIDATES ABIMELECH'S INTEGRITY

**Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in integrity([tom](#)) of your heart ([lebab](#)) you have done this** - Abimelech

had unknowingly taken a married woman to be his wife and was about to commit adultery. Notice **I know** is an expression of God's omniscience to be able to read Abimelech's heart. God sees his heart and agrees that he did not think he was doing wrong. However, even if we know nothing against ourselves, that does not prove that everything else is fine with the Lord. Proverbs 21:2 says "Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts."

**THOUGHT** - How does your heart "weigh in" with God today? Is your conscience clean? Are you sins confessed? Would you pass His "integrity test?"

**And I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her** - Note the double emphasis on God's intervention - "I...kept...." and "I did not...." God explains that in His sovereignty, He presumably restrained Abimelech's normal sexual impulses and kept him from sinning against Him (all sin is against God)!

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#### **F B Meyer - Genesis 20:6 I also withheld thee from sinning against Me.**

As we review our lives, we can see many occasions on which our feet had well-nigh gone — our steps were on the very brink of the precipice. Another inch, and we should have brought shame on Christ and lasting remorse to ourselves. To what can we attribute our escape but to the grace of God, which withheld us, even though we failed to recognize it?

He does not withhold us from temptation. — He could not do so without serious and permanent loss. The waves of ink will surge up against the white marble palace of the soul. To us, as to our Lord, fresh from under the opened heavens, the tempter will come. What the fire is in fixing the color on the porcelain vase, that temptation is in rendering permanent the lessons and impressions made by God's providence and grace.

He does not withhold us from occasions in which it would be easy to transgress. — Abimelech was not hindered from taking Sarah into his palace. The door of occasion and opportunity stood open before him; but he was withheld from the fatal act. We must never infer that occasion confers license. The fact of an opportunity being present does not warrant indulgence in wrong-doing.

If God withheld Abimelech, who did not seek his special help, how much more those that seek Him! — You are not insensible of the perils of your life; but wait earnestly and persistently on God. Are you more eager to be kept than He to keep? Did He not implant that desire? Will He not do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think? Is not the good Shepherd strong enough to keep one poor trembling sheep? Begone, unbelief! My God whom I serve is able to deliver, and He will! (Daniel 3:17).

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#### **Dictionary of Biblical Imagery - DREAMS, VISIONS**

Dreams and their uses and images are an integral part of the oldest stories both within the Bible and without. The ancients recognized both dreams and visions but frequently used the terms interchangeably. Scripture mentions night visions (Dan 2:19; 7:2, 7, 13; Micah 3:6; Acts 18:9) and visions of the night (Gen 46:2; Job 4:13; 20:8; 33:15; Is 29:7). Just as with visions, so also the text often specifies that dreams happen at night (Gen 20:3; 31:24; 40:5; 41:11; 1 Kings 3:5). In poetic passages especially, dreams occur parallel to visions (Job 33:15; Is 29:7; Dan 7:1–2). Given this usage it would be unwise to attempt any distinction, other than the obvious, that visions are usually daytime events while dreams seem confined to the night. God breaks into the human experience through both dreams and visions.

**Dreams as the Voice of God in the Night.** The frequency and significance of dreams mentioned in Scripture stems from their import as divine revelation to a particular individual. All dreams in antiquity were not necessarily considered divine, but with few exceptions (see below) ordinary dreams and nightmares play little or no part in the plot of most biblical narratives. The text repeatedly mentions dreams as one of the common means of "inquiring of the Lord" (a technical term for seeking an oracle), raising the possibility that dream seeking is the method of inquiry when no method is specified, especially when the word of the Lord comes by night (1 Sam 3, esp. v. 15; 2 Sam 7:4, 17).

At times divine messages receive indirect mention (i.e., cryptic to us as foreigners) when the context or situation imply the medium of a dream. The "word of the Lord" need not be overtly labeled a dream to be one. The text sometimes mentions such revelatory encounters without using the word dream. Perhaps many more "inquirings of God" actually refer to dreams even without directly mentioning them. The word of the Lord comes at night to Nathan (2 Sam 7:4, 17 par. 1 Chron 17:3, 15) and to Gideon (Judges 6:25; 7:9). Isaiah says, "My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you" (Is 26:9 NRSV). Hosea observes that prophets in particular stumble by night (Hos 4:4). Micah describes the absence of revelation as a night without a vision (Micah 3:6). When the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, he relates, "In the night I saw ..." (Zech 1:8 NRSV). Night is the expected time to hear the voice of God or witness his revelation. Even so the OT also sets the precedent for even daytime visions accompanied by deep sleep (Gen 15:12), and the NT follows (Acts 10:10; 22:17).

**Dreams as Transparent or Obscure.** In some dreams the narrative is streamlined or God speaks directly (Gen 31:24); others are



symbolic, yet still obvious. Joseph's brothers need no interpreter to understand the standard symbolism in his dreams (Gen 37:8). Even his doting father wearies of their transparent meanings. The dream of Gideon's enemy needs no explanation (Judg 7:13). Other dreams couch their truth in metaphor so obscure that a skilled wise man (such as Joseph or Daniel) is required to render them intelligible. Pharaoh's cows do require explanation (Gen 41), and so do the baker's and the butler's dreams (Gen 40:5–19). (Pharaoh's dream is given twice to mark it as sure; Peter's vision [Acts 10:16] occurs three times to mark its significance, but he doesn't understand it until later [v. 17].) Nebuchadnezzar's dream ups the ante, requiring not only interpretation but recall as well (Dan 2). Some dream revelations are so difficult for humanity to understand that to do so is like trying to read a sealed scroll (Is 29:11). In his allusion to Isaiah's metaphor, John observes that humanity is unworthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:1–2), implying that if revelatory dreams are obscure, it is because God has no people worth talking to.

**Dreams as Oracles (Answers Sought from God).** The very common OT phrase “inquired of the Lord” indicates consultation of the divine oracle, often by dreams. In most ancient societies, people sought out divine oracles by sleeping in sacred precincts that would inspire a dream, so called incubation dreams. The pharaohs record that they slept in temples seeking dreams, as did the royalty at Ugarit. The Assyrian monarch, as chief of the oracle priests, received dreams at night in the temple. Greek suppliants learned how to be cured through dreams given in the temple of Asclepius.

The Bible mentions that pagan deities communicated in this way (Is 65:4), but some of the OT heroes seem to have contacted God in a similar fashion. Jacob, because of a dream, anoints his stone pillow and gives it the name Beth-El, “sanctuary” or “god-house” (Gen 28). Samuel, when the word of the Lord and visions had become infrequent, slept not in his own quarters as did his mentor Eli, but in the sanctuary instead (1 Sam 3:1–3), probably seeking his initial oracular dream (1 Sam 3:7). The vividness of the voice in his dream vision (1 Sam 3:15) seems to have awakened Samuel, disrupted the oracle and astonished him; but it did not astonish the experienced Eli. (The career of Samuel as God's mouthpiece is bracketed by the voice incident of 1 Sam 3:1, which establishes him as prophet [1 Sam 3:20], and the Endor incident of 1 Sam 28:14, marking his final oracular insight into the future. In each case once for his predecessor and once for his replacement, the oracle forebodes ominous consequences.) Solomon slept at the great high place in Gibeon for his dream from God (1 Kings 3:4, 5). When this expected channel is shut down, Saul complains that God no longer answers him by dreams (1 Sam 28:15).

Like the technique of incubation dreams in the OT, in the NT visions come to those who pray: Zechariah (Lk 1:10–11), Jesus at the Transfiguration (Lk 9:29), Cornelius (Acts 10:2–3), Peter (Acts 10:9–10; 11:5), Paul (Acts 9:11–12; 22:17; 23:11).

God uses dreams to reveal his message; however, some forms of oracular inquiry are off limits. Necromancy (consulting the spirits of the departed) is strictly prohibited as an abomination (Lev 19:31; 20:6; Deut 18:11), yet the lure of predictions from the dead kept the practice alive. Passages in Isaiah refer to incubation dreams in tombs to obtain revelations from nether-world deities and spirits (Is 8:19–20; 28:15–22; 65:4). In the ancient world the belief was prevalent that spirits of the departed could impart their dim understanding of the future to those in this world through dreams. As in other cases (see ORACLES) it is not the oracular technique that is unacceptable, but service to any spirit other than God (Ex 20:5).

**Dreams as Oracles.** Dreams, then, are clearly a large subset of oracles. Just as oracles from God can come through pagan prophets (Balaam), so too the dreams of the enemy can be omens from God (Judg 7:13–15). God does not hesitate to send dreams to non-Israelites (Gen 20:3; Mt 27:19). In response to Jacob's financial concerns, God sends a dream to Jacob in order to inform him that his attempts at animal husbandry had nothing to do with the amazing increase of the flocks for which he had contracted with Laban as his wages (Gen 31:10–12). This God-given insight to Jacob, the supplanter (his Hebrew name means “Heel” or “Crook”), parallels the figure of wily Odysseus and his divine gift of craftiness.

**Dreams as Spirits or Angels:** Angels as Dreams. Underlying the use of dreams as revelation is the tacit belief that spirits bring the dream. Such a view is nearly universal in cultures which value dreams. The OT states both that the Lord and the angel of the Lord appears or speaks in dreams: “God said in a dream” (Gen 20:6), “God came in a dream by night and said” (Gen 31:24), but also “the angel of God said in a dream” (Gen 31:11). Angels debate and explain Daniel's vision (Dan 8:13–16). The Hebrew and Greek words translated “angel” mean “messenger.” Angels naturally accompany the dream messages they carry. Based on such OT precedents all the angel appearances that Matthew narrates occur “during a dream” (Mt 1:20, 24; 2:12, 13, 19, 22). In fact, visions and angels coincided so often that the appearance of an angel suggests to Peter an “unreal” state of mind (Acts 12:9). An angel brings John's apocalyptic vision (Rev 1:1).

As a dark parallel to God's use of dreams, God's enemies also manipulate humanity's thoughts. The people of antiquity reasoned that if angels were the messengers that brought God's message in dream form, bad angels, messengers of Satan, could bring bad dreams. For Job, as for his contemporaries in Mesopotamia and Greece, the dream “amid visions of the night” is carried by a “spirit,” an “indiscernible form” and a “voice” that “glides past the face,” producing “chills,” uttering “a stealthy word” that “the ear receives as a whisper” (Job 4:12–16). Outside of Scripture the phrase “terrors of the night” designates nightmares, and it appears in a list of spiritual evils in Psalm 91:5. The amulets and incantations (see MAGIC) written by contemporary exorcists focused on preventing

nightmares by adjuring demons not to return. Sexual dreams were viewed as demonic rape (cf. Tobit 6:14). Texts such as Psalm 91 and 121 provide comfort and allay such very real fears by assuring God's sleepless protection.

**Dreams as Deception from Evil Sources.** Some dreams are not merely benign. Some scare and terrify (Job 7:14). When a prophet misinterpreted his vision, it came from a lying spirit (1 Kings 22:22–23) or was faked (Jer 23:16, 27, 32). “The teraphim utter nonsense, the diviners see lies, the dreamers tell false dreams” (Zech 10:2 NRSV). Against this background, dreaming indicates self-delusion (Jude 8).

**Dreams as Unreal, Nothing or Ephemeral.** While God may speak through dreams, not all dreams are from God. Many are simply an annoying distraction. The people of the Bible did not insist on shoe-horning all dreams into a supernatural category. Their metaphors equating dreams with phantoms and nothing betray such an understanding. Joseph's brothers mock “the dreamer” and attempt to short circuit his dreams, suspecting they are the product of Joseph's ego (Gen 37:19–20). Israel's enemies are not to be feared; they are like dreams (Is 29:7). The restoration of Zion made the people feel like “those who dream” (Ps 126:1). After envying the prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist comes to see that their transitory success ending in sudden ruin makes them as insubstantial “as a dream when one awakes” and “as fantasies” (Ps 73:20). Sirach disparages dreams: Divinations and omens and dreams are folly; and like a woman in travail, the mind has fancies (Sir 24:5).

**Dreams as the Human Condition.** There are hints in the Bible of dreams much more like those of today. Isaiah's metaphor, “As when the hungry dream of eating and awake unsatisfied” alludes to recurrent nightmares or Sisyphean dreams (Is 29:8). In the apocrypha, Sirach mentions one “troubled by the visions of his mind like one who has escaped from the battle front” (posttraumatic stress disorder, Sir 40:6). In his pragmatism the Preacher expresses his frustration with dreams as unreliable and difficult to interpret: “A dream comes with much business” (Eccles 5:3 RSV). His observation that “when dreams increase, empty words grow many” (Eccles 5:7 RSV) also suggests a surfeit of dream interpretations. For Job, who has become the Almighty's target, even sleep provides no comfort because “then thou dost scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions” (Job 7:14 RSV). Yet even these most human of dreams could provide counsel (Ps 16:7).

**Dreams as Spiritual Health.** The observation that “the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision” comments on the moral decay of Israel (1 Sam 3:1 RSV). Sin in the camp prevents the dream oracle from functioning (1 Sam 14:37–38). The loss of oracles and dreams signifies abandonment by God (Mic 3:6–7). The country's spiritual ruin becomes real ruin as “her prophets obtain no vision from the LORD” (Lam 2:9 RSV). The Lord promises to replace Ezekiel's proverb, “Every vision comes to nought,” with the “fulfillment of every vision” (Ezek 12:22, 23 RSV). The prophecy that dreams and visions will return assumes as a prerequisite the purifying of the nation and a pouring out of God's spirit (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

See also ANGEL; APOCALYPSE, GENRE OF; CHEAT THE ORACLE; DANIEL, BOOK OF; JOSEPH THE PATRIARCH; ORACLE; PROPHECY, GENRE OF; PROPHET, PROPHETESS.

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#### QUESTION - [What is common grace?](#)

**ANSWER** - The doctrine of common grace pertains to the sovereign grace of God bestowed upon all of mankind regardless of their [election](#). In other words, God has always bestowed His graciousness on all people in all parts of the earth at all times. Although the doctrine of common grace has always been clear in Scripture, in 1924, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) adopted the doctrine of common grace at the Synod of Kalamazoo (Michigan) and formulated what is known as the “three points of common grace.”

The first point pertains to the favorable attitude of God toward all His creatures, not only toward the elect. “The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Psalm 145:9). Jesus said God causes “his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45) and God “is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Luke 6:35). Barnabas and Paul would later say the same thing: “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). In addition to His compassion, goodness, and kindness, God also sheds His patience upon both the elect and the non-elect. While God's patience for His own is undoubtedly different from His patience with those whom He has not chosen, God still exercises “longsuffering” toward those whom He has not chosen (Nahum 1:3). Every breath that the wicked man takes is an example of the mercy of our holy God.

The second point of common grace is the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society. Scripture records God directly intervening and restraining individuals from sinning. In Genesis 20, God restrained Abimelech from touching Sarah, Abraham's wife, and affirmed it to him in a dream by saying, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her” (Genesis 20:6). Another example of God restraining the wicked hearts of evil men is seen in God's protection of the land of Israel from being invaded by the pagan nations on their border. God commanded the men of Israel that three times a year they would leave their plot of land to go and appear before Him (Exodus 34:23). To ensure the protection of God's people from invasion during these times, even though the pagan nations surrounding them desired their land

year-round, God promised that “no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God” (Exodus 34:24). God also restrained David from taking revenge on Nabal for scorning the messengers that David sent to greet Nabal (1 Samuel 25:14). Abigail, Nabal’s wife, recognized God’s grace when she pleaded with David not to seek vengeance against her husband, “since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands...” (1 Samuel 25:26). David acknowledged this truth by responding, “As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you...” (1 Samuel 25:34).

This second point of common grace not only includes God’s restraining of evil, but also His sovereignly releasing it for His purposes. When God hardens the hearts of individuals (Exodus 4:21; Joshua 11:20; Isaiah 63:17), He does so by releasing His restraint on their hearts, thereby giving them over to the sin that resides there. In His punishment of Israel for their rebellion, God gave “them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices” (Psalm 81:11-12). The passage of Scripture best known for speaking of God’s releasing of restraint is found in Romans 1 where Paul describes those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. God “gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” (Romans 1:28).

The third point of common grace as adopted by the CRC pertains to “civic righteousness by the unregenerate.” This means that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such influence that even the unsaved man is enabled to perform good deeds toward his fellow man. As Paul said of a group of unregenerate Gentiles, they “do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law” (Romans 2:14). The necessity of God restraining the hearts of the unredeemed becomes clear when we understand the biblical doctrine of [total depravity](#). If God did not restrain the evil that resides in the hearts of all men, hearts which are “deceitful and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), humanity would have destroyed itself centuries ago. But because He works through common grace given to all men, God’s sovereign plan for history is not thwarted by their evil hearts. In the doctrine of common grace, we see God’s purposes stand, His people blessed, and His glory magnified. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**Genesis 20:7 “Now therefore, **restore** the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”**

- **a prophet:** . 1Ki 18:1-46 1Co 14:4 Ex 4:16 7:1 12:1-3 18:17 7:1 1Ch 16:22 Ps 25:14 105:9-15 Heb 1:1
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Jeremiah 27:18 (PROPHETS AND PRAYER) “But **if they are prophets**, and if the word of the LORD is with them, **let them now entreat the LORD of hosts** that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon.

## ABRAHAM THE PRAYING PROPHET

**Now therefore, **restore**** ([shub/sub](#); Lxx - [apodidomi](#) - give back) **the man’s wife, for he is a prophet**([nabiy](#); Lxx - [prophetes](#)) - **Restore** is a command in the Lxx [apodidomi](#) and in the [aorist imperative](#) means “Give her back now! Do not delay!” God gives Abimelech a command to give Sarah back to Abraham. God puts Abimelech’s integrity to the test. Now that he knows the truth, he must **restore** Sarah to Abraham. This is the first use of **prophet** in the Bible and the only use in Genesis.

**Krell** on **prophet** - This is the first explicit reference to a prophet in the OT. Prophets received direct revelations from God, spoke to others for God, and praised God (2Chr 25:1). Here, the role of the prophet includes that of intercessor, as it does elsewhere in Scripture. Abraham’s role of prophet in Genesis is revealed in the following ways: He was a spokesman for God (Ge 12:2-3), he was an intercessor for God (Ge 18:16-33), and he was privileged by God to know future events (Ge 15:4-5; 17:1-8; 18:17-18). While we may not be prophets like Abraham, we remain loved by God, called by God, and commissioned by God to be His servants and ambassadors.

**Believer's Study Bible** - This is the first use of the word “prophet” in the O.T. The etymology of the Hebrew word is uncertain. As the word is used in Scripture of true prophets, it refers, at base, to a divinely chosen spokesman (cf. Ex. 6:28-30; 7:1, 2; Num. 12:4-8; Deut. 18:9-22; Heb. 1:1, 2).

**And he will pray** ([palal](#); Lxx - [proseuchomai](#)) **for you and you will live** ([chayah](#); Lxx - [zao](#)) - One role of a prophet is to intercede for those to whom he gives revelation. We see this in the life of Moses (golden calf, Ex 32:11-13, or the return of the spies, Nu 14:13-

19). We see it with the prophet Samuel at the approach of the Philistines (1Sa 7:8-10) or when Israel asked for a king, (1Sa 12:16-25). Other prophets who prayed include Jeremiah (concerning the flight to Egypt, Jer 42:1-6) and Amos (Jer 7:2,5).

**But if you do not restore** ([shub/sub](#); Lxx - [apodidomi](#) - give back) **her, know** ([yada](#); Lxx - [ginosko](#)) **that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours** - God reiterates that the first step is for Abimelech to restore Sarah. The phrase **all who are yours** speaks of Abimelech's household or family (cf Ge 20:18+). God means business for He gives him a second command **know** ([yada](#)) calling for immediate attention/response.

**Krell** - Don't you love how God gives options? Option #1: Give Sarah back and live (see Ezek 33:14-16). Option #2: Keep Sarah and die—you and everyone in your family! This is the character and nature of God. He extends grace and mercy but if we refuse to obediently respond, He offers another option. It's as if God graciously says, "Okay, you can have it your way." Before moving on, notice God's amazing grace: He instructed the deceiver to pray for the deceived!20 This must have left Abimelech shaking his head. How could Abraham be a liar and at the same time a man of God to whom Abimelech must go to receive healing and salvation? Answer: God uses sinful people to accomplish His purposes. This can be seen in the fact that while Abraham was not eager to talk about his faith to Abimelech, God was not reluctant to own Abraham as a person and a prophet. Why didn't God keep His relationship to Abraham quiet? Wouldn't the poor testimony of Abraham drive Abimelech away from God? Apparently, God has such confidence in Himself and His grace that He can still use broken vessels like Abraham and you and me. God does not withdraw His grace because of our failure.

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**Prophet** ([05030](#)) [nabiy](#) conveys the essential idea of an authorized spokesman, of a person authorized to speak for another. He functions in essence as another's mouthpiece (cf same word used of Aaron as Moses' mouthpiece in Ex 7:1+). In the OT a true prophet spoke or proclaimed the message of Yahweh, neither adding to nor taking away from the message. Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament (Dt. 34:10) and only Abraham is called a prophet before Moses (Gen. 20:7). In Nu 11:29+ Moses said "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" Moses predicted Jesus the greatest Prophet in Dt 18:15, 18+. There were a number of activities that the prophets of God were involved in such as communicating doctrine, issuing judgments, communicating future events, serving in the Temple, performing miracles, proclaiming Messianic prophecies, and interceding through prayer for the people (Hab. 3).

**Nabiy in the Pentateuch** - Gen. 20:7; Exod. 7:1; Num. 11:29; Num. 12:6; Deut. 13:1; Deut. 13:3; Deut. 13:5; Deut. 18:15; Deut. 18:18; Deut. 18:20; Deut. 18:22; Deut. 34:10;

**Pray** (Intercede) ([06419](#)) [palal](#) is the most common Hebrew word used to describe the general act of prayer (Jer. 29:7). It was often used to describe prayer offered in a time of distress, such as Hannah's prayer for a son (1 Sam. 1:10, 12); Elisha's prayer for the dead boy (2 Kgs. 4:33); Hezekiah's prayer for protection and health (2 Kgs. 19:15; 20:2); and Jonah's prayer from the fish (Jon. 2:1[2]). In some contexts, this word described a specific intercession of one person praying to the Lord for another, such as Abraham for Abimelech (Gen. 20:7, 17); Moses and Samuel for Israel (Num. 11:2; 21:7; 1 Sam. 7:5); the man of God for the king (1 Kgs. 13:6); or Ezra and Daniel for Israel's sins (Ezra 10:1; Dan. 9:4, 20). This prayer of intercession could also be made to a false god (Isa. 44:17; 45:14).

Palal - Gen. 20:7; Gen. 20:17; Gen. 48:11; Num. 11:2; Num. 21:7; Deut. 9:20; Deut. 9:26; 1 Sam. 1:10; 1 Sam. 1:12; 1 Sam. 1:26; 1 Sam. 1:27; 1 Sam. 2:1; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Sam. 7:5; 1 Sam. 8:6; 1 Sam. 12:19; 1 Sam. 12:23; 2 Sam. 7:27; 1 Ki. 8:28; 1 Ki. 8:29; 1 Ki. 8:30; 1 Ki. 8:33; 1 Ki. 8:35; 1 Ki. 8:42; 1 Ki. 8:44; 1 Ki. 8:48; 1 Ki. 8:54; 1 Ki. 13:6; 2 Ki. 4:33; 2 Ki. 6:17; 2 Ki. 6:18; 2 Ki. 19:15; 2 Ki. 19:20; 2 Ki. 20:2; 1 Chr. 17:25; 2 Chr. 6:19; 2 Chr. 6:20; 2 Chr. 6:21; 2 Chr. 6:24; 2 Chr. 6:26; 2 Chr. 6:32; 2 Chr. 6:34; 2 Chr. 6:38; 2 Chr. 7:1; 2 Chr. 7:14; 2 Chr. 30:18; 2 Chr. 32:20; 2 Chr. 32:24; 2 Chr. 33:13; Ezr. 10:1; Neh. 1:4; Neh. 1:6; Neh. 2:4; Neh. 4:9; Job 42:8; Job 42:10; Ps. 5:2; Ps. 32:6; Ps. 72:15; Ps. 106:30; Isa. 16:12; Isa. 37:15; Isa. 37:21; Isa. 38:2; Isa. 44:17; Isa. 45:14; Isa. 45:20; Jer. 7:16; Jer. 11:14; Jer. 14:11; Jer. 29:7; Jer. 29:12; Jer. 32:16; Jer. 37:3; Jer. 42:2; Jer. 42:4; Jer. 42:20; Ezek. 16:52; Dan. 9:4; Dan. 9:20; Jon. 2:1; Jon. 4:2

**Genesis 20:8 So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened.**

- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**PAGAN'S PROPER RESPONSE:FEAR  
FEAR OF YAHWEH'S WARNING**

**So** - Term of conclusion. Based on God's revelation, Abimelech responds.

**Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened** ([yare](#)) (were terrified) - **Arose early** implies he wastes no time in addressing the divine indictment that was hanging over the head of the royal household! He calls an emergency staff meeting with all his officials! Note the appropriate reaction to God's word of warning is that they are **frightened**. This should be because God was not stuttering to Abimelech! Their response suggests that they even as godless pagans still have some degree of fear of the Lord. Perhaps it is fear of the punishment, but it is still a response. This is ironic because later one of Abraham's excuses is "I thought surely there is **no fear** of God in this place!" (Ge 20:11). He was wrong. The irony is that the pagans fear God, while Abraham's actions (in this context) show he fears man, which is why he was ensnared in this mess in the first place! (Pr 29:25).

**THOUGHT** - How sadly ironic that these ancient men were terrified by the thought of God punishing them and killing them. How much more terrified of eternal punishment should men and women be today who do not know Jesus as Savior and Lord! And yet, as Paul wrote in Romans 3:18+ "THERE IS (ABSOLUTELY) **NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.**" Sadly, fear of hell has even been classified as a psychological disorder! And I quote "A fear of going to Hell is a common obsession in the [Scrupulosity subtype of OCD](#). People with Scrupulosity often fear that they have committed an immoral act that deserves to be punished, often based on their religious beliefs. A person who suffers with this type of OCD may fear the punishment of going to Hell." Beloved, they will go to hell if they refuse God's generous offer of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, for "there is salvation in (ABSOLUTELY) no one else; for there is no other name (OTHER THAN "JESUS") under heaven that has been given among men by which we **MUST BE SAVED.**" (Acts 4:12+).

**Bob Utley** - "**arose early in the morning**" This is a Hebrew idiom of the urgency and immediacy (cf. Gen. 21:14; 22:3) of responding to God's expressed will.

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#### **Matthew Henry Notes: Ge 20:8-13**

Abimelech, being thus warned of God in a dream, takes the warning, and, as one truly afraid of sin and its consequences, he rises early to obey the directions given him.

**I. He has a caution for his servants**, Ge 20:8. Abraham himself could not be more careful than he was to command his household in this matter. Note, Those whom God has convinced of sin and danger ought to tell others what God has done for their souls, that they also may be awakened and brought to a like holy fear.

**II. He has a chiding for Abraham.** Observe,

**1. The serious reproof which Abimelech gave to Abraham**, Ge 20:9, 10. His reasoning with Abraham upon this occasion was very strong, and yet very mild. Nothing could be said better; he does not reproach him, nor insult over him, does not say, "Is this your profession? I see, though you will not swear, you will lie. If these be prophets, I will beg to be freed from the sight of them:" but he fairly represents the injury Abraham had done him, and calmly signifies his resentment of it.

(1.) He calls that sin which he now found he had been in danger of a great sin. Note, Even the light of nature teaches men that the sin of adultery is a very great sin: be it observed, to the shame of many who call themselves Christians, and yet make a light matter of it.

(2.) He looks upon it that both himself and his kingdom would have been exposed to the wrath of God if he had been guilty of this sin, though ignorantly. Note, The sins of kings often prove the plagues of kingdoms; rulers should therefore, for their people's sake, dread sin.

(3.) He charges Abraham with doing that which was not justifiable, in disowning his marriage. This he speaks of justly, and yet tenderly; he does not call him a liar and cheat, but tells him he had done deeds that ought not to be done. Note, Equivocation and dissimulation, however they may be palliated, are very bad things, and by no means to be admitted in any case.

(4.) He takes it as a very great injury to himself and his family that Abraham had thus exposed them to sin: "What have I offended thee? If I had been thy worst enemy, thou couldst not have done me a worse turn, nor taken a more effectual course to be revenged on me." Note, We ought to reckon that those do us the greatest unkindness in the world that any way tempt us or expose us to sin, though they may pretend friendship, and offer that which is grateful enough to corrupt nature.



(5.) He challenges him to assign a cause for his suspecting them as a dangerous people for an honest man to live among: "What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? Ge 20:10. What reason hadst thou to think that if we had known her to be thy wife thou wouldst have been exposed to any danger by it?" Note, A suspicion of our goodness is justly reckoned a greater affront than a slight upon our greatness.

## 2. The poor excuse that Abraham made for himself.

(1.) He pleaded the bad opinion he had of the place, Ge 20:11. He thought within himself (though he could not give any good reason for his thinking so), "Surely the fear of God is not in this place, and then they will slay me."

{1.} Little good is to be expected where no fear of God is. See Ps. 36:1.

{2.} There are many places and persons that have more of the fear of God in them than we think they have: perhaps they are not called by our dividing name, they do not wear our badges, they do not tie themselves to that which we have an opinion of; and therefore we conclude they have not the fear of God in their hearts, which is very injurious both of Christ and Christians, and makes us obnoxious to God's judgment, Mt. 7:1.

{3.} Uncharitableness and censoriousness are sins that are the cause of many other sins. When men have once persuaded themselves concerning such and such that they have not the fear of God, they think this will justify them in the most unjust and unchristian practices towards them. Men would not do ill if they did not first think ill.

(2.) He excused it from the guilt of a downright lie by making it out that, in a sense, she was his sister, Ge 20:12. Some think she was own sister to Lot, who is called his brother Lot (Ge 14:16), though he was his nephew; so Sarah is called his sister. But those to whom he said, She is my sister, understood that she was so his sister as not to be capable of being his wife; so that it was an equivocation, with an intent to deceive.

(3.) He clears himself from the imputation of an affront designed to Abimelech in it by alleging that it had been his practice before, according to an agreement between him and his wife, when they first became sojourners (Ge 20:13): "When God caused me to wander from my father's house, then we settled this matter." Note,

{1.} God is to be acknowledged in all our wanderings.

{2.} Those that travel abroad, and converse much with strangers, as they have need of the wisdom of the serpent, so it is requisite that that wisdom be ever tempered with the innocence of the dove. It may, for aught I know, be suggested that God denied to Abraham to punish them for this sinful compact if they will not own their marriage, why should God own it? But we may suppose that, after this reproof which Abimelech gave them, they agreed never to do so again, and then presently we read (Ge 21:1, 2) that Sarah conceived.

**Genesis 20:9 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 on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."**

- What hast: Ge 12:18 26:10 Ex 32:21,35 Jos 7:25 1Sa 26:18,19 Pr 28:10
- a great: Ge 38:24 39:9 Lev 20:10 2Sa 12:5,10,11 Ro 2:11 Heb 13:4
- ought: Ge 34:7 2Sa 13:12 Titus 1:11
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ABRAHAM'S POOR WITNESS TO PAGANS

**Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us?"** This expresses Abimelech's shock as to Abraham's conduct. It is ironic that just as Lot had compromised his testimony before the Sodomites (Genesis 19), so Abraham in Genesis 20 compromised his testimony before Abimelech and the citizens of Gerar by lying.

**And how have I sinned ([chata'](#)) against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done**

**to me things that ought not to be done."** - The Hebrew reads "*How did I sin against you that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?*" Here Abimelech expresses his moral indignation. This pagan king understands the word **sin** and takes it seriously in contrast to most of our modern (pagan) world! He is holding Abraham responsible for causing him to sin. It is notable that adultery was considered **"a great sin"** even by this heathen king. (J. J. Rabinowitz, "[The Great Sin in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts](#)," JNES 18 (1959): 73, )

[Wenstrom](#) has a good point noting that "Abimelech's statement **"You have done to me things that ought not to be done"** demonstrates his awareness of a moral code even among the unbeliever. The apostle Paul taught that God has instilled an awareness of a moral code in the conscience of every human being, believer and unbeliever alike. Romans 2:14, 15 "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness (cf "INTEGRITY OF MY HEART") and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

**Deffinbaugh:** Abimelech had been wronged by Abraham. He had not only done what was wrong in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of pagans. Abraham, who was to be a source of blessing (Ge 12:2,3), had become a proverbial pain in the neck to those in whose land he sojourned. ([Don't Ever Say Never](#))

[Jack Arnold](#) - Abimelech, an unsaved king, had to rebuke Abraham, child of the King, for his evil deeds. Men of the world stand out superior at times to the people of God, and this is one of the heartbreaking things about the spiritual realm.

**Matthew Henry** - Verses 9-13. See here much to blame, even in the father of the faithful. Mark his distrust of God, his undue care about life, his intent to deceive. He also threw temptation in the way of others, caused affliction to them, exposed himself and Sarah to just rebukes, and yet attempted an excuse. These things are written for our warning, not for us to imitate. Even Abraham hath not whereof to glory. He cannot be justified by his works, but must be indebted for justification, to that righteousness which is upon all and unto all them that believe. We must not condemn all as hypocrites who fall into sin, if they do not continue in it. But let the unhumiliated and impenitent take heed that they do not sin on, thinking that grace may abound. Abimelech, being warned of God, takes the warning; and being truly afraid of sin and its consequences, he rose early to pursue the directions given him.

#### Genesis 20:10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?"

[AMP](#) And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered or seen [in us or our customs], that you have done this [unjust] thing?"

[AMPC](#) And Abimelech said to Abraham, What did you see [in us] that [justified] you in doing such a thing as this?

[CSB](#) Abimelech also asked Abraham, "What made you do this?"

[CEB](#) Abimelech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking when you did this thing?"

[CJB](#) Avimelekh went on, asking Avraham, "Whatever could have caused you to do such a thing?"

- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### WHAT POSSESSED YOU TO DO THIS THING?

**And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?"** - NIV = ""What was your reason for doing this?" The question implies that Abraham had some motive for deceiving Abimelech.

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#### G Campbell Morgan - What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing ?— Gen. 20.10

These were the words of Abimelech to Abraham; of the King of Gerar to the father of the chosen people. In the chapter we have the account of a deflection from the pathway of faith on the part of the man of faith. In such departure he was reduced to the expedient of making arrangements for his own safety by deceitful practices, in that he hid the truth that Sarai was his wife, and told the half-truth that she was his sister, she being his half-sister, the daughter of his father, Terah, by another wife. The astounding thing is that he had done this before in the case of his visit to Egypt. This question of Abimelech was an inquiry as to what motive had prompted Abraham, and it brought this answer: "Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place." What a revelation we have here of blundering! Abraham thought that among a people who lacked the fear of God, he must act for himself, and without God.

God taught him by this experience, first, that His fear existed where he did not think it did; and therefore that it was not only unnecessary, but also wholly wrong, for him to act as he had done. By such action he had placed the whole purpose of God in jeopardy, and but for the intervention of God it would have been made impossible of realization through Abraham. What unutterable folly it is ever to limit God in our thinking, and so to have to fall back upon our own policies! To do so is always to turn aside from the high ways of His purpose, and to imperil the possibility of working together with Him.

**Genesis 20:11 Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."**

- **Surely:** Ge 22:12 42:18 Ne 5:15 Job 1:1 28:28 Ps 14:4 36:1-4 Pr 1:7 2:5 Pr 8:13 16:6 Ro 3:18
- **kill:** Ge 12:12 Ge 26:7
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### **ABRAHAM EXPLAINS WITH WEAK EXCUSES**

**Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife-** As discussed above, these pagans seem to have more **fear of God** than Abraham! The real problem was that the fear of God wasn't in Abraham! Note the phrase **Because I thought**. Sometimes thinking can get us into trouble especially if it is not guided by God's Word! Abraham thought, when he should have talked with God (or trusted God)! This is his first excuse for sinning!

**Krell** on **surely there was no fear of God** - What bitter irony! We must be careful not to judge people on appearances. Often, the ungodly are not as ungodly as one might think and the godly are not as godly as one might think. Abraham jumped the gun and made a judgment error. He then tries to imply that it was an honest mistake—"no big deal." We're good at this one, aren't we? We try to sidestep responsibility by pointing to our upbringing (that's just the way I am), or by blaming the media (they are always planting sinful thoughts in my head). The truth is that we are responsible for our own decisions. Abraham may have made his decision based on a faulty premise but he was responsible for the faulty premise!

**Bruce Goettsche** - Abraham was confronted with his sin and he had two excuses. The first is, "Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife." In other words: It was an honest mistake. Abraham seeks to explain away his sin. He tries to imply that it is "no big deal." We're good at this one, aren't we? We try to sidestep responsibility by pointing to our upbringing (that's just the way I am), or by blaming the media (they are always planting sinful thoughts in my head). The truth is that we are responsible for our own decisions. Abraham may have made his decision based on a faulty premise . . . but he was responsible for the faulty premise! The second excuse was a rationalization. Abraham says, "Besides, she really is my sister. She is the daughter of my father but not my mother." In other words, "Look, technically I didn't lie." Again, if they handed out degrees for mastery of rationalization many of us would have a M.Rat. after our names! How many times have we comforted ourselves with this line: "everybody does this"? (Like when we are driving over the speed limit). Or how about, "compared to most people . . .". In other words, in comparison to others, I'm not so bad. Each of those is a rationalization. Sin is not measured against other people . . it is measured against God's standard....Make no mistake, when we have fallen in one area, Satan will return to that area many times seeing if he can get us to fall again. Satan will exploit every weakness we reveal. But this is not Satan's fault . . . it is ours.

And sadly this is not the first time Abraham used this line of lame reasoning, which shows his periodic failure to trust God to protect him. And it won't be the last because Isaac will prove "life father, like son!"

Genesis 12:12 (**ABRAM**) and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and **they will kill me**, but they will let you live.

Genesis 26:7 (**ISAAC**) When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "**the men of the place might kill me** on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful."

**THOUGHT** - Now keep in mind Abraham has been walking with the Lord, worshipping the Lord and communicating with the Lord for almost 25 years, and he is even known as the "father of the faithful" and yet once again we see his faith falter as he has a moral lapse. Here's the point, none of us has "arrived!" That's called glory! I have walked with Jesus for 38 years and been seriously committed to Him the entire time and yet as I enter the last lap of my race (age 77), I find sin still sneaks up and ensnares me, sometimes even making me wonder "Am I really saved?" We must remember this race is not a dash but a marathon and we will stumble and fall, but enabled by God's mercy and His Spirit of grace, we can sing out "With confidence I

now draw nigh, And, "Father, Abba, Father," cry." Sing it out beloved and pay attention to the words of Charles Wesley's hymn...

**Arise, my soul, arise:**

Shake off the guilty fears;  
The bleeding Sacrifice  
In my behalf appears:  
Before the throne my Surety stands,  
Before the throne my Surety stands:  
My name is written on His hands.

*Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise*  
*Arise, my soul, arise.*  
*Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise*  
*Arise, my soul, arise.*  
*Shake off your guilty fears and rise*

He ever lives above,  
For me to intercede,  
His all-redeeming love,  
His precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears,  
Received on Calvary;  
They pour effectual pray'rs,  
They strongly plead for me:  
"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry,  
"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry,  
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

My God is reconciled;  
His pard'ning voice I hear;  
He owns me for His child;  
I can no longer fear;  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And, "Father, Abba, Father, " cry.

**Deffinbaugh** calls Abraham's explanation "Situational ethics" which is "a system of ethics based upon the denial of either the existence of God or His ability to act in man's behalf. Situationalism (ED: [SEE NOTE BELOW](#)) always posits a dilemma in which there is no alternative other than a sinful act. In such cases we are forced to decide on the basis of the lesser of two evils. ([Don't Ever Say Never](#))

**Henry Morris** - The fact that Abimelech did not deny Abraham's expressed charge indicates that his fears may well have been justified. (BORROW [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Ryrie** - Genesis 20:11-13 Abraham made three feeble excuses for his deception: (1) he thought there was no fear of God in Gerar; (2) he claimed he did not speak an untruth when he said that Sarah was his sister (since she was his half sister); (3) this was an arrangement they had previously agreed upon. (BORROW [Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - Abraham is now talking to Abimelech who is greatly disturbed that Abraham would do a thing like lying about his wife. Again, Abraham was not trusting God. He felt that he was moving down into a godless place, but he finds out that Abimelech has a high sense of what is right and wrong. Abimelech puts a tremendous value upon character and apparently is a man who knows God. Poor Abraham doesn't look good by the side of Abimelech here.

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**QUESTION** - [What is situationism? What is a situationist?](#)

**ANSWER** - Situationism is a theory used in psychology that assumes that a person's behavior is dictated largely by his situation

rather than by his personal attributes. For a situationist, external factors, rather than internal motivations, define behavior. For example, a situationist would say that a violent criminal's environment is chiefly to blame; if the criminal had been raised on a farm in Nebraska instead of the inner city, he would not have had a tendency to commit crimes.

Situationism has been tempered by other theories like interactionism, which favor both internal and external factors as contributing to the behavioral outcome of a person. If, for instance, a man grows up on a farm in Nebraska, it does not mean that he has no criminal impulses, only that he may never have reason or motivation to explore those impulses to the degree he would have living in the inner city. Conversely, a man living in rural Mongolia may have an amazing talent for theoretical physics, but, because of his geographical location, he may never be exposed to the subject.

Situationism is a weak theory logically, as it downplays the role of human volition. In real life, there are many examples of people who did not allow their situations to dictate their behavior. An individual may be immersed in negativity yet still make positive choices. And vice versa. While it is obvious that our circumstances do help shape us, we always have a choice in how we respond. If situationism were valid, then Ben Carson would never have been a neurosurgeon, and Judas Iscariot would never have betrayed the Lord Jesus.

Similarly, situationism is incompatible with biblical truth. The Bible teaches that we have choices to make. [Job](#) is a good example. The Bible describes Job as "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Then Satan came before God and accused Job of shallowness: "Does Job fear God for nothing? . . . Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (Job 1:9–11). In attributing Job's good behavior to the circumstances that surrounded him, Satan was espousing situationism. But, even after God took away all that Job had, "Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:10). Satan the situationist was proved wrong by Job's choice.

We know that God is omniscient and omnipotent (1 John 3:20; Psalm 139:4; Matthew 10:29–30; Job 42:2) and that He is present in the life of each person He created (1 Timothy 2:4). We must then assume that He allows all the situations that we find ourselves in. In fact, God uses situations to help mold us: "The testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:3; see also 1 Peter 1:7). But God's [providence](#) in prompting our spiritual growth is a far cry from situationism with its fatalistic approach.

Every person's situation contains both the tragedy of living in a fallen world and the [grace of God](#) as He offers forgiveness and an eternal home in heaven (John 3:16–19). No person's situation, external or internal, is too much for God to overcome. He sees our situation and gives us hope for the future: "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:21). First Peter 4:19 is the reverse of situationism: "Those who suffer according to God's will should . . . continue to do good." In His mercy, God makes the believer "alive together with Christ" so that He can show him "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6–7).

There is no situation in the world, however terrible, that will last forever. Those who trust Christ have the assurance of a home with God. That place is beyond the reach of human tragedy, and it is eternal (Revelation 22:1–5). [GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### QUESTION - [Does the Bible teach situational ethics?](#)

**ANSWER** - Situational ethics is a particular view of moral ethics that holds that the morality of an act is determined by its context. Situational ethics states that if there is a right and wrong, it is merely determined by the desired outcome of the situation. Situational ethics is different from moral relativism in that moral relativism states that there is no right or wrong. Situational ethics envelopes a code of ethics in which meeting the needs of each situation determines what is right or wrong.

From cover to cover, the Bible is true, consistent, and applicable. Does the Bible teach, admonish, or even lean toward advocating situational ethics? The short answer is "no." Let us consider three principles:

1) God is creator and sustainer. 2) All of God's Word is true. Even the parts we don't like or understand. 3) Right and wrong are determined and defined by who God is.

1. God is creator and sustainer. Situational ethics states that morality is determined by surroundings or circumstance. God's Word says morality is determined by God's sovereignty, as He is creator and sustainer. And that is not a matter of semantics but of fact. Even if God were to give a command to one group of people and forbid it to another group, the determination of whether it is right or wrong, ethical or not, is not based on the situation, but rather on God's command. God has the authority to govern right and wrong. Romans 3:4 says, "Let God be true and every man a liar."

2. All of God's Word is true. To suggest that the Bible advocates situational ethics would be to imply that there are errors contained therein. That is not possible. It is not possible because of [number 1](#); God is creator and



sustainer.

3. Right and wrong are defined by who God is. Love is God's nature. He defines what love is not by what He does, but simply by who He is. The Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Love is selfless and considerate of others, never seeking its own glory or pleasure (1 Corinthians 13). Therefore, by virtue of who God is, the Bible, being given by God and being all true, cannot contain a system of ethics that would in itself defy the nature of God. Situational ethics finds right and wrong to please the majority or a single person out of selfishness. Love is the opposite. Love seeks to encourage and build up others.

Two foundational problems with situational ethics are the reality of an absolute truth and the concept of real love. The Bible does teach absolute truth, which demands that right and wrong are predetermined by a Holy God. And love—God's definition of true, honest, real love—leaves no room for selfish or impure motivations. Even if someone were to say that the situation demands selflessness, it is still a human determination and not a divine one. A human being's reasons for determining what is best, without true love are foundationally selfish.

So what happens when things look right but God says they are wrong? We must trust God's sovereignty and trust "that all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). If we belong to Christ, God has given us His Spirit (John 16), and through Him we have an understanding of what is right and wrong. Through Him we are convicted, encouraged, and guided to righteousness. An earnest desire to know the truth of a matter, coupled with seeking God, will be rewarded with God's answer. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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## **Fear Factor**

Abraham said, ". . . surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife." —  
Genesis 20:11

Today's Scripture : Genesis 20:1-13

If you're a fan of Shakespeare, you know that his heroes always have a serious character flaw. It makes for a good story and teaches some important lessons. The same is true of our Bible hero Abraham. His flaw? Fear.

Twice Abraham succumbed to his fear that a ruler would kill him and steal his wife (Gen. 12:11-20; 20:2-13). Fearing for his life, he deceived both Pharaoh and King Abimelech by saying, "She is my sister"—in essence welcoming the king to take Sarah into his harem (20:2). With fear dictating his actions, he put at risk God's plan that through him and Sarah a great nation would arise (12:1-3).

But before we judge Abraham, we should ask ourselves a few questions. For fear of losing our job, would we compromise our integrity? For fear of appearing old-fashioned, would we set aside our values? For fear of being ridiculed or misunderstood, would we neglect sharing the gospel and put someone's eternity at risk? Only one thing will conquer our fears: tenacious faith in God's presence, protection, power, and promises.

If your fear is putting God's wonderful plans for you at risk, remember that He will never ask you to do anything He can't bring to completion, even if it requires miraculous intervention on His part. By: Joe Stowell (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](http://OurDailyBread Ministries). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

It often helps in time of trial  
When fearful and alone,  
To know that every doubt we feel  
The greatest saints have known.  
—D. De Haan

Let your faith overcome your fear, and God will turn your worry into worship.

**Genesis 20:12 "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife;**

- **Besides:** Ge 11:29 12:13 1Th 5:22
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## HALF A LIE HALF A SISTER!

**Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife;** Technically he is telling the truth, only to cover the lie he made that she was not his wife. This kind of kinship marriage between Abraham and Sarah was not yet prohibited among God's people since the Mosaic Law, which prohibited such things, was not yet given (Lev. 18:9, 11; Deut. 27:22; Ezek. 22:11).

*Verbally it was correct; but really it was a lie.*

A peculiarity about this lie was, it was a half-truth: Sarah was his half-sister. But God dealt with it as a lie because it was told with the intention to deceive.

*A half-truth is a complete lie!*

**Krell** I can just picture Abraham stuttering and stammering to get these words out. Yet, this explanation is not even helpful and it is totally confusing. What Abraham is saying is, "Look, technically I didn't lie." He tries to defend himself by technicalities but not by truthfulness. But a half-truth, said with intent to deceive, is always a whole lie.

**THOUGHT** - How often do you allow people to draw the wrong conclusions or impressions by withholding evidence? Do you want to give the impression you are spiritual when you are not? Do you try to appear happy when your heart is breaking? Do you try to look sophisticated when you are desperate and despondent? Faith is facing up to reality and dealing openly with others, even when the truth may appear to put you in jeopardy or may make you vulnerable.

**W H Griffith Thomas** - It is to be observed, too, that the proposal was clearly actuated by selfishness; there was no regard for Sarai, but only for his own safety. How strange this is! He had journeyed all the way from Ur of the Chaldees, and yet could not trust God with his wife or with his own life. How small great people can be! How weak strong men can be! How bad good people can be!

**Paul Apple** calls this excuse the "Loophole Approach."

**J Vernon McGee** - Abraham lets it all out now. He says, "To tell the truth, it's half a lie. Sarah is my half sister, and she is my wife."

**Henry Morris** - Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. In the early centuries after the Dispersion, close marriages were often necessary in very small tribal populations. This may have been especially desirable in godly families in order to preserve faithfulness to God's revelation and His purposes. As noted before, this situation was not harmful genetically until mutations had accumulated in the nation's genetic pool. By the time of Moses, this had apparently become a problem, and laws against incest were established (BORROW [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Jon Courson** - "Thou shalt not bear false witness," thundered God from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20). What is a false witness? A false witness is the right information with the wrong implication. In other words, it's saying the right thing, but using it in the wrong way. Abraham gave the right information for, technically, Sarah was his half-sister, but he gave it with the wrong implication, because he failed to tell Abimelech that she was also his wife. (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary](#))

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**Norman Geisler** - [When Critics Ask](#) - GENESIS 20:12—If incest is condemned, why did Abraham marry his sister?

**PROBLEM:** Abraham admitted here that Sarah his wife was really his "sister" (cf. Gen. 17:15–16). Yet incest is denounced in no uncertain terms in many passages (cf. Lev. 18:6; 20:17). Indeed, the Lord declared, "Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother" (Deut. 27:22).

**SOLUTION:** Abraham was not beyond sin, as his lie about Sarah to king Abimelech reveals (Gen. 20:4–5). And Abraham did admit that Sarah was "the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife" (Gen. 20:12). However, even granting this, there is no real proof Abraham violated any law for two reasons. First, the incest laws were not given by Moses until some 500 years after Abraham. So he surely could not be held responsible for laws that had not yet been promulgated. Second, the terms "sister" and "brother" are used with great latitude in the Bible, just as the terms "father" and "son." Jesus, for example, was the "son" (i.e., descendant) of David (Matt. 21:15). "Sister" means a near relative, but it does not as such indicate the degree of nearness we understand by the word "sister." Lot, Abraham's nephew, is called a "brother" (Gen. 14:12, 16). Likewise, "daughter" can mean granddaughter or great granddaughter.

Considering the age to which Abraham lived (175, Gen. 25:7), it is possible that he married only a granddaughter on his father's side, or even a niece or grand niece. In any event, there is no proof that Abraham's marriage to Sarah violated any existing incest law. But if it did, the Bible simply gives us a true record of Abraham's error. When God called Sarah Abraham's "wife" (Gen. 17:15),

He was not legitimizing any alleged incest, but merely stating a fact.

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**QUESTION - [Why did God allow incest in the Bible? WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - There are numerous examples of incest in the Bible. The most commonly thought-of examples are the sons/daughters of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4), Abraham marrying his half-sister Sarah (Genesis 20:12), Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19), Moses' father Amram who married his aunt Jochebed (Exodus 6:20), and David's son [Amnon](#) with his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13). It is important to note, however, that in two of the above instances (Tamar and Lot), one of the parties involved was an unwilling participant in the incest—better described as rape in those cases.

It is important to distinguish between incestuous relationships prior to God commanding against them (Leviticus 18:6–18) and incest that occurred after God's commands had been revealed. Until God commanded against it, it was not incest. It was just marrying a close relative. It is undeniable that God allowed "incest" in the early centuries of humanity. Since Adam and Eve were the only two human beings on earth, their sons and daughters had no choice but to marry and reproduce with their siblings and close relatives. The second generation had to marry their cousins, just as after the flood the grandchildren of Noah had to intermarry amongst their cousins. One reason that incest is so strongly discouraged in the world today is the understanding that reproduction between closely related individuals has a much higher risk of causing genetic abnormalities. In the early days of humanity, though, this was not a risk due to the fact that the human genetic code was relatively free of defects.

Another consideration is that incest today almost always involves a pre-pubescent or powerless victim, and the perpetrator is abusing his or her authority with the goal of unilateral sexual pleasure. By that standard, the "incest" of the Bible has nothing whatsoever in common with modern-day incest. There was no power difference between [Cain and his wife](#), for example; the goal of Abraham and Sarah's marriage was to create a family. Intermarriage among close family members was a necessity in the generations immediately following Adam and Noah and was not a sinful perversion of sex.

It seems that, by the time of Moses, the human genetic code had become polluted enough that close intermarriage was no longer safe. So, God commanded against sexual relations with siblings, half-siblings, parents, and aunts/uncles (Genesis 2:24 seems to indicate that marriage and sexual relations between parents and children were never allowed by God). It was not until many centuries later that humanity discovered the genetic reason that incest is unsafe and unwise. Genetics was not an issue in the early centuries of humanity, and the marriages that occurred between Adam and Eve's children, Abraham and Sarah, and Amram and Jochebed were not selfish pursuits of sexual gratification or abuses of authority; accordingly, those relationships should not be viewed as incestuous. The key is that sexual relations between close relatives were viewed differently pre-Law and post-Law. It did not become "incest" until God commanded against it. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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**Related Resource:**

- [Is it wrong to have a romantic relationship with a close relative? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Genesis 20:13 and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"**

- God: Ge 12:1,9,11-20 Ac 7:3-5 Heb 11:8
- This: 1Sa 23:21 Ps 64:5 Ac 5:9
- say: Ge 12:13
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **ABRAHAM'S EXCUSES CONTINUE**

**And it came about** - Things do not just happen to happen. They happen because God is controlling the scenes He is behind.

**When God caused me to wander from my father's house** - NLT = "When God called me to leave my father's home and to travel from place to place, I told her, 'Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.'" God did call him to "wander" is a true statement.

**Krell** Lastly, Abraham even blames God for his vulnerable condition. In 20:13a, he says, "And it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house." The implication is that if God had not told him to leave his father's house, he would have never

ended up in Abimelech's kingdom. If he had never arrived in Abimelech's kingdom, he would have never lied. "Therefore, it's not my fault, it's really God's fault."<sup>26</sup> Whether we are conscious of it or not, we often blame God for the sins we commit. Lord, if only You...

**Bob Utley** - "**when God caused me to wander**" In English it almost seems that he is implying that it is God's fault that he acted this way. It reminds us of how Adam blamed God (cf. Gen. 3:12). However, it is uncertain if we can understand this in this way.

**Jon Courson** - Abraham wasn't caught off guard by Pharaoh and Abimelech wanting to add Sarah to their harems. No, the verse before us makes it clear that Abraham's lie was part of a predetermined strategy. And in this I am reminded once again that a person doesn't fall into sin, but rather walks into sin one step at a time. (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary](#))

**Borgman** has an interesting comment on the Hebrew for "God." - This is our common practice whenever we travel for past 25 years. Elohim = "gods" plural noun; usually takes a singular verb; here Abraham uses a **plural verb** = "caused me to wander" – saying: *when the gods caused me to wander*. He has no sense of witness for the true and living God and so talks about God in Abimelech's terms; "That's the way we have always done it" – appealing to tradition and previous experience."

**NET NOTE** adds that "The Hebrew verb (**caused me to wander**) is plural. This may be a case of grammatical agreement with the name for God, which is plural in form. However, when this plural name refers to the one true God, accompanying predicates are **usually singular** in form. Perhaps Abraham is accommodating his speech to Abimelech's polytheistic perspective. If so, one should translate, "**when the gods made me wander.**"

**That I said to her, 'This is the kindness ([hesed](#)) which you will show to me** - Literally "This is your loyal deed which you can do for me." NIV = "This is how you can show your love to me." See also [lovingkindness in the Bible](#)

**Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother - CSB** = "Show your loyalty to me wherever we go and say about me: 'He's my brother.'" Abraham explains that since God's plan for his life called for him to wander, he instructed Sarah when they entered a new place to say that she is his sister out of fear that her great beauty would cause the king of the land to kill him in order to add her to his harem. Abraham's plan was sinful because it expressed his lack of faith in the Lord's protection.

**Krell** - To make matters worse, in Ge 20:13b we learn that Abraham coerced Sarah into his deception. He said to Sarah, "This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, 'He is my brother.'" Ladies, Abe used one of the oldest lines in the book—literally! "If you really love me..." We do this today. If you love me, you'll sleep with me! If you love me, you'll lie to the IRS when the auditor comes! If you love me, you'll understand my need to play the field! If you love me, you'll tell the boss I'm sick. If you love me, you'll put me ahead of God! Yet, this is in contradiction to the message of the Bible. God loves us with an unconditional and everlasting love and He expects us to love one another with His love (John 13:34-35; 15:12).

**Jack Arnold** - Abraham tells the king that he and Sarah had entered into a secret agreement to do the "sister plot" whenever he was in trouble (20:13). NOTE. This was a sinful pact that Abraham and Sarah had in every place they went, Instead of trusting God, they entered into this conspiracy, which was a half-truth, but it was told to deceive and revealed a lack of faith in God. This gives the reason why this last cowardly and unworthy act of unbelief in the life of Abraham was recorded. This sordid sin had to be judged before Abraham and Sarah could have a son and Abraham could be brought to the final test of offering Isaac. POINT: Sin in a Christian must be judged before he can have the full blessing of God.

*How many Christians are there who will not judge sin in their lives,  
and as a result, there is no blessing in their lives?*

**J Vernon McGee** - Abraham did not have complete confidence and trust in God, and so when they started out, he and Sarah made a pact that anywhere they went where it looked as if Abraham might be killed because of his wife, Sarah would say that Abraham was her brother. Abraham and Sarah thought that that would keep Abraham from being killed. They made that little agreement, and they had used it down in Egypt, and here they have used it again. This sin must be dealt with before God is going to hear and answer Abraham's prayer in sending a son. Isaac will not be born until this is dealt with. How many Christians are there who will not judge sin in their lives, and as a result, there is no blessing in their lives? If those who are in places of leadership in our fundamental churches would confess their sins and deal with the sins that are in their lives, I frankly believe that we could have revival. I do not believe there will be any blessing until sin is dealt with. Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:28–32+). Blessing is being withheld from the church and from the lives of many believers because we will not deal with the sin in our lives. This is a tremendous spiritual lesson here in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Genesis.

**Genesis 20:14 Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.**

- **took:** Ge 20:11 12:16
- **restored:** Ge 20:2,7 12:19,20
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **RESTITUTION TO ABRAHAM**

**Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.** This exactly repeats what Pharaoh did for Abraham in Ge 12:16+ "Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels."

**Matthew Henry (concise)** - Verses 14-18. We often trouble ourselves, and even are led into temptation and sin, by groundless suspicions; and find the fear of God where we expected it not. Agreements to deceive generally end in shame and sorrow; and restraints from sin, though by suffering, should be thankfully acknowledged. Though the Lord rebuke, yet he will pardon and deliver his people, and he will give them favour in the sight of those with whom they sojourn; and overrule their infirmities, when they are humbled for them, so that they shall prove useful to themselves and others.

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### **Matthew Henry Notes: Ge 20:14-18**

Here is,

**I. The kindness of a prince which Abimelech showed to Abraham.** See how unjust Abraham's jealousies were. He fancied that if they knew that Sarah was his wife they would kill him; but, when they did know it, instead of killing him they were kind to him, frightened at least to be so by the divine rebukes they were under.

1. He gives him his royal licence to dwell where he pleased in his country, courting his stay because he gives him his royal gifts (Ge 20:14), sheep and oxen, and (Ge 20:16) a thousand pieces of silver. This he gave when he restored Sarah, either,

{1.} By way of satisfaction for the wrong he had offered to do, in taking her to his house: when the Philistines restored the ark, being plagued for detaining it, they sent a present with it. The law appointed that when restitution was made something should be added to it, Lev. 6:5. Or,

{2.} To engage Abraham's prayers for him; not as if prayers should be bought and sold, but we should endeavour to be kind to those of whose spiritual things we reap, 1 Co. 9:11. Note, It is our wisdom to get and keep an interest with those that have an interest in heaven, and to make those our friends who are the friends of God.

{3.} He gives to Sarah good instruction, tells her that her husband (her brother he calls him, to upbraid her with calling him so) must be to her for a covering of the eyes, that is, she must look at no other, nor desire to be looked at by any other. Note, Yoke-fellows must be to each other for a covering of the eyes. The marriage-covenant is a covenant with the eyes, like Job's, Job 31:1.

**II. The kindness of a prophet which Abraham showed to Abimelech:** he prayed for him, Ge 20:17, 18. This honour God would put upon Abraham that, though Abimelech had restored Sarah, yet the judgment he was under should be removed upon the prayer of Abraham, and not before. Thus God healed Miriam, when Moses, whom she had most affronted, prayed for her (Nu 12:13), and was reconciled to Job's friends when Job, whom they had grieved, prayed for them (Job 42:8-10), and so did, as it were, give it under his hand that he was reconciled to them. Note, The prayers of good men may be a kindness to great men, and ought to be valued.

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**Genesis 20:15 Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.”**

- my land: Ge 13:9 34:10 47:6
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries



Abimelech said, “**Behold**, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.”

Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, “**Behold**, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver;**behold**, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.”

KJV Genesis 20:16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reprov'd.

NET Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, "Look, I have given a thousand pieces of silver to your 'brother.' This is compensation for you so that you will stand vindicated before all who are with you."

CSB Genesis 20:16 And he said to Sarah, "Look, I am giving your brother 1,000 pieces of silver. It is a verification of your honor to all who are with you. You are fully vindicated."

ESV Genesis 20:16 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 who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

NIV Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."

NLT Genesis 20:16 And he said to Sarah, "Look, I am giving your 'brother' 1,000 pieces of silver in the presence of all these witnesses. This is to compensate you for any wrong I may have done to you. This will settle any claim against me, and your reputation is cleared."

NRS Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, "Look, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your exoneration before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."

NJB Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, 'Look, I am giving your brother a thousand pieces of silver. This will allay suspicions about you, as far as all the people round you are concerned; you have been completely vindicated.'

NAB Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said: "See, I have given your brother a thousand shekels of silver.**Let that serve you as a vindication before all who are with you; your honor has been preserved with everyone.**"

YLT Genesis 20:16 and to Sarah he hath said, 'Lo, I have given a thousand silverlings to thy brother; lo, it is to thee a covering of eyes, to all who are with thee;' and by all this she is reasoned with.

GWN Genesis 20:16 He said to Sarah, "Don't forget, I've given your brother 25 pounds of silver.**This is to silence any criticism against you from everyone with you. You're completely cleared.**"

BBE Genesis 20:16 And he said to Sarah, See, I have given to your brother a thousand bits of silver so that your wrong may be put right; now your honour is clear in the eyes of all.

RSV Genesis 20:16 To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted."

NKJ Genesis 20:16 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 rebuked.

ASV Genesis 20:16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver. Behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee. And in respect of all thou art righted.

DBY Genesis 20:16 And to Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, let that be to thee a covering of the eyes, in respect of all that are with thee, and with all; and she was reprov'd.

- thy: Ge 20:5 Pr 27:5
- thousand: Ge. 23:15, 16.
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## VINDICATION FOR SARAH

To Sarah he said, “**Behold**, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver;**behold**, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.” Notice there might be a touch of sarcasm as Abimelech calls him **your brother**, not your husband! Social convention demands that Abimelech present his gift for Sarah through Abraham who is the male head of the family. This was a very large gift. Abimelech gave this gift of the thousand shekels as a compensation for the offense against Sarah, so that she was fully vindicated as not having sinned in the sight of everyone and her household would recognize this.

**Krell** - In showing generosity to Abraham, Abimelech was heaping burning coals on Abraham's head (Ro 12:20). Abraham should have been giving gifts to Abimelech, because he was in the wrong. Instead, it was Abimelech who was generous (cf. Ge 12:16). By God's grace, Abraham did not receive punishment but plunder. Wherever he went, whatever he did, Abraham stood under God's protection and blessing.

**Wenham on a thousand pieces of silver** - Fifty shekels was the maximum ever asked for in bride money (Deut 22:29); the typical old Babylonian laborer received a wage of about half a shekel a month. This gives an indication of the scale of Abimelech's compensation. But note the barbed “I am giving ... to your brother”—not “to your husband.” Despite his prompt obedience to God's instructions and his display of magnanimity toward Abraham, Abimelech still resented Abraham's behavior. (BORROW [Genesis 16-50 page 74](#))

**NET NOTE** - **A thousand pieces** [Heb “shekels”] **of silver**. The standards for weighing money varied considerably in the ancient Near East, but the generally accepted weight for the shekel is 11.5 grams (0.4 ounce). This makes the weight of silver here 11.5 kilograms, or 400 ounces (about 25 pounds). **To your ‘brother.’** Note the way that the king refers to Abraham. Was he being sarcastic? It was surely a rebuke to Sarah. What is amazing is how patient this king was. It is proof that the fear of God was in that place, contrary to what Abraham believed (see v. 11).

**NET NOTE** on **it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared** - Heb “Look, it is for you a covering of the eyes, for all who are with you, and with all, and you are set right.” The exact meaning of the statement is unclear. Apparently it means that the gift of money somehow exonerates her in other people's eyes. They will not look on her as compromised (see G. J. Wenham, Genesis [WBC], 2:74)

**Wenham** - “That is for you as compensation,” lit. “covering of eyes.” The exact meaning of this unique phrase is unclear. The gift makes one blind to what has happened (cf. 32:21 [20]; Job 9:24). But it is not clear whether it is Sarah's eyes or other people's eyes that are covered, in other words, that they no longer look on her as a compromised woman. The last clause, “in everything you will be justified,” seems to favor the latter, though it is grammatically difficult. (BORROW [Genesis 16-50 page 74](#))

**Bob Utley** - The phrase, “**your vindication**” is literally “for you a covering of the eyes” (CONSTRUCT BDB 492 and 744), which is a Hebrew idiom to show that Sarah was completely innocent and was compensated for the embarrassment.

**Genesis 20:17 Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children.**

- Ge 20:7 29:31 1Sa 5:11,12 Ezr 6:10 Job 42:9,10 Pr 15:8,29 Isa 45:11 Mt 7:7 21:22 Ac 3:24 Php 4:6 1Th 5:25 Jas 5:16
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **ABRAHAM THE INTERCESSOR** **ELOHIM THE HEALER**

**Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children**- Amazing grace especially in light of Psalm 66:18 which says “If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” Abraham had just sinned before God and even when confronted gives 3 excuses to Abimelech, but there is no clear cut confession and yet here we see he prays, God hears and God answers. As I said, another example of amazing grace (unmerited favor)! And don't miss the irony -- Abraham's prayer opened the wombs of these women, and yet his own wife was still barren!

**Krell** - What a humbling experience it must have been for Abraham to intercede on behalf of Abimelech. A deep sense of unworthiness must have come over him. It was surely not his righteousness, which was the basis for divine healing. Any time that we are used of God, it is solely because of the grace of God.

**Bob Utley** - “**God healed Abimelech**” We do not know the exact disease that came upon Abimelech and his family, but it caused the birth of children to be impossible. Apparently this was one way that God protected Abimelech from having relations with Sarah. Also, from Gen. 20:17 and 18, we see that barrenness was considered a divine curse. This is one reason that Abraham had such a hard time believing God's words of grace when Sarah was barren.

**Jack Arnold** - Prayer does not change God's plan but it brings God's plan into action in our experience.

**Ian Duguid** (quoted by Hughes): God's ability to use even our sins for his own purposes shows that he doesn't love us simply for the great things we can do for him.

Jesus loves me when I'm good,  
When I do the things I should.  
Jesus loves me when I'm bad,  
Though it makes Him very sad.

**Jon Courson** - Because you have fallen short in their eyes or hurt them badly, there are people to whom you may not be able to preach or with whom you may not be able to share. But this story tells me that although I may not be able to preach to them or share with them, I get to effectively bless them through prayer. When I pray for my enemies, not only does it release blessing upon them, but it keeps me from getting involved in a cycle of bitterness which will only destroy me. You cannot pray blessing on a person and stay angry with him. It's impossible. That's why Jesus said, "Pray for your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). I challenge you to pray for the people toward whom you feel bitterness or hostility; for the people you just don't like. Pray that they'll be healed, that they'll prosper, that they'll do well. God will answer your prayer, and you'll be blessed in the process. (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary](#))

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#### QUESTION - [What is intercessory prayer?](#)

**ANSWER** - Quite simply, intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. The role of mediator in prayer was prevalent in the Old Testament, in the cases of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Hezekiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the ultimate intercessor, and because of this, all Christian prayer becomes intercession since it is offered to God through and by Christ. Jesus closed the gap between us and God when He died on the cross. Because of Jesus' mediation, we can now intercede in prayer on behalf of other Christians or for the lost, asking God to grant their requests according to His will. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

A wonderful model of intercessory prayer is found in Daniel 9. It has all the elements of true intercessory prayer. It is in response to the Word (v. 2); characterized by fervency (v. 3) and self-denial (v. 4); identified unselfishly with God's people (v. 5); strengthened by confession (v. 5-15); dependent on God's character (vv. 4, 7, 9, 15); and has as its goal God's glory (vv. 16-19). Like Daniel, Christians are to come to God on behalf of others in a heartbroken and repentant attitude, recognizing their own unworthiness and with a sense of self-denial. Daniel does not say, "I have a right to demand this out of You, God, because I am one of your special, chosen intercessors." He says, "I'm a sinner," and, in effect, "I do not have a right to demand anything." True intercessory prayer seeks not only to know God's will and see it fulfilled, but to see it fulfilled whether or not it benefits us and regardless of what it costs us. True intercessory prayer seeks God's glory, not our own.

The following is only a partial list of those for whom we are to offer intercessory prayers: all in authority (1 Timothy 2:2); ministers (Philippians 1:19); Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6); friends (Job 42:8); fellow countrymen (Romans 10:1); the sick (James 5:14); enemies (Jeremiah 29:7); those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44); those who forsake us (2 Timothy 4:16); and all men (1 Timothy 2:1).

There is an erroneous idea in contemporary Christianity that those who offer up intercessory prayers are a special class of "super-Christians," called by God to a specific ministry of intercession. The Bible is clear that *all* Christians are called to be intercessors. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their hearts and, just as He intercedes for us in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27), we are to intercede for one another. This is not a privilege limited to an exclusive Christian elite; this is the command to all. In fact, not to intercede for others is sin. "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23).

Certainly Peter and Paul, when asking others to intercede for them, did not limit their request to those with a special calling to intercession. "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5). Notice it was the whole church that prayed for him, not just those with a gift of intercession. In Ephesians 6:16-18, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers—all of them—on the fundamentals of the Christian life, which includes intercession "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Clearly, intercessory prayer is part of the Christian life for all believers.

Further, Paul sought prayer on his behalf from all the Roman believers in Romans 15:30. He also urged the Colossians to intercede for him in Colossians 4:2-3. Nowhere in any biblical request for intercession is there any indication that only a certain group of people could intercede. On the contrary, those who seek others to intercede for them can use all the help they can get! The idea that

intercession is the privilege and calling of only some Christians is without biblical basis. Worse, it is a destructive idea that often leads to pride and a sense of superiority.

God calls all Christians to be intercessors. It is God's desire that every believer be active in intercessory prayer. What a wonderful and exalted privilege we have in being able to come boldly before the throne of Almighty God with our prayers and requests! [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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#### Related Resources:

- [SPECIAL TOPIC: INTERCESSORY PRAYER](#)
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**Steven Cole** - God is marked by holiness and grace. These two seemingly opposite traits are in perfect balance. God never sacrifices His holiness for grace, nor His grace for holiness.

#### A. GOD IS MARKED BY HOLINESS.

In His holiness, God struck Abimelech and all his household with some disease which prevented them from conceiving children and would have killed them, if Abimelech had not restored Sarah to Abraham. That's pretty severe! But it shows how highly God values marriage and sexual purity within marriage.

The text also reveals God as the source of all holiness. God tells Abimelech that the reason he didn't sin was because God prevented it (Ge 20:6). We can never boast in our holiness, because any holiness we have is derived from the Lord. He is a holy God who takes sin seriously. Even though it would have been accidental from Abimelech's point of view, it would have been sin from God's perspective. God is holy and separate from all sin. But also...

#### B. GOD IS MARKED BY GRACE.

As the psalmist declares, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Ps. 130:3-4). God's grace should never lead us to license, but to fear Him and to fear sinning.

We see here **God's grace toward Abimelech**. He was a relatively good man, as far as Canaanite kings in that day went. But he was a sinner, just like everyone else. God justly could have killed him to deliver Sarah. But He showed him grace.

We also see **God's grace toward Abraham and Sarah**. Sarah wasn't as responsible as Abraham, since she didn't devise this plan. But she consented to it. While it's right for a wife to submit to her husband, it's not right for her to submit to him in doing wrong. But in spite of their sin, God graciously blessed Abraham and Sarah, financially through Abimelech's gifts, and with the birth of Isaac (Ge 21:1-7). God graciously was willing to be associated with Abraham, even in his sin, by calling Abraham his **prophet**. If I were God, I'd want to keep it quiet that Abraham knew me until this thing blew over. But God didn't disown Abraham for this failure. In the many other references to Abraham in the Bible, God mentions his faith often, but He never mentions this sin. Amazing grace!

#### Thank God that He doesn't deal with us according to our sins!

Because the Lord Jesus Christ bore the penalty we deserved, God is now free to deal with us in grace. Just as God sovereignly chose Abraham and blessed him in spite of his sins, so He has sovereignly chosen us and blesses us in spite of our sins. That shouldn't make us be sloppy about our sin. It should make us want to be holy in order to please the God who loved us and gave Himself for us!

#### Conclusion

Juan Carlos Ortiz has captured the balance between God's grace and our good works nicely. He writes (Leadership, Fall, 1984, p. 46.),

Watching a trapeze show is breathtaking. We wonder at the dexterity and timing. We gasp at near-misses. In most cases, there is a net underneath. When they fall, they jump up and bounce back to the trapeze.

In Christ, we live on the trapeze. The whole world should be able to watch and say, "Look how they live, how they love one another. Look how well the husbands treat their wives. And aren't they the best workers in the factories and offices, the best neighbors, the best students?" That is to live on the trapeze, being a show to the world.

What happens when we slip? The net is surely there. The blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, has provided forgiveness for all our trespasses. Both the net and the ability to stay on the trapeze are works of God's grace.

Of course, we cannot be continually sleeping on the net. If that is the case, I doubt whether that person is a trapezist.

Some of you may be on the net, discouraged by besetting sins. Look to God's grace, confess your sin, accept His forgiveness, and get back on the trapeze. Or in the words of the author of Hebrews, after telling of the faith of Abraham, Sarah, and many others, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).

#### Discussion Questions

1. Does God eradicate our sin nature? What does the Bible mean when it says we are dead to sin (Rom. 6:11; Col. 2:20; 3:3)?
2. How would you answer the argument that if we can't lose our salvation by sinning, then it will encourage us to sin more?
3. How can we emphasize grace without encouraging licentiousness?
4. Is it ever okay to lie (e.g., to protect someone else)?

**Genesis 20:18 For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

- Ge 20:7 12:17 16:2 30:2 1Sa 1:6 5:10
- [Genesis 20 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### **LORD OF CREATION CLOSES WOMBS**

**For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife-** Abraham and Sarah were in the line of Messiah and thus God protected Sarah's purity.

[Believer's Study Bible](#) - This is a beautiful testimony of God's protection of a woman whose husband has put aside his responsibility (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). God made certain that Sarah would know only her husband and would bear his child (cf. Ge 21:1).

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