

## Genesis 20:1-18 and 21:1-9

When Abraham rescued the inhabitants of Sodom and refused the spoils of war, I believe he had reached a high point in his walk of faith.

Yes, he had declined the king's offer in order to avoid any entanglement with that wicked city.

So, with complete faith in God's provision, he said, **"I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."**

Abraham was walking by faith, and I still remember commenting that he had learned his lesson in Egypt, but, unfortunately, he hadn't.

No, as we will soon find out in today's lesson, Abraham did not always trust in God's provision.

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Genesis 20:1-2 **"And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.**  
**2: And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah."**

Yes, Abraham was lying about his relationship to Sarah again, and I'm afraid it was not just the second time he had lied. No, it was merely the second time he had gotten caught.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, so let's go back to V 1-- **"And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country,**

**and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur,  
and sojourned in Gerar."**

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About the same time that Lot chose Sodom,  
Abraham chose the plain of Mamre for  
his home.

It was the place of the altar, the place  
where Abraham could live a separated  
life unto his God.

Yes, the Plain of Mamre had been a good  
choice, and he had lived there for  
about 20 years.

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So why did Abraham, apparently without any  
direction from God, suddenly pull up  
stakes and move far away from his  
beloved plain?

To all appearances, it didn't seem to be a  
good choice.

And even Abraham must have had second thoughts, for he later admitted--"**I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place.**"

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Yes, it seems that Abraham had chosen a bad neighbourhood to live in.

First of all, Gerar was the capital city of the Philistines, a people who were most ungodly.

Also it was located right on the border of Egypt, and we all know what happened to Abraham when he visited that country.

So, in more ways than one, Abraham was going down the same old path again.

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So why, after so many years, did he leave the Plain of Mamre?

After all, there wasn't a famine chasing him out of his home like last time.

Well, we don't really know what motivated him, for scripture hasn't given us the answer.

So we can only suggest some of the possible reasons for this big move.

Perhaps Abraham's old friends, Mamre, Eshcol and Aner, were dead now.

Certainly Mamre had been very gracious in the past, and had permitted Abraham to raise his flocks on his land, and had even helped him to rescue his nephew.

But time makes changes, and perhaps the younger generation was becoming a little uneasy with the status quo.

By now, Abraham had become very rich and powerful, and would pose a threat to

their safety if he ever turned against them.

So, through no fault of his own, Abraham might have worn out his welcome.

Or possibly this move was completely his own idea.

Gerar controlled a lucrative caravan route, and so a rich and powerful man like Abraham might do very well in that area.

But, of course, this is simply speculation. We don't really know whether this move was prompted by necessity or opportunity, but we do know that this new area made Abraham nervous.

And unfortunately it seems that Abraham was walking by sight rather than faith.

V 2 **"And Abraham said of Sarah his wife,  
She is my sister."**

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As far as we know, Abraham had not built an altar in Gerar.

So it is also quite possible that he had not given an open testimony to his faith in God.

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There is a lesson here for us.

When we find ourselves in a new situation, like a new job or a new neighbourhood, etc., it is always a good idea to set the record straight right from the beginning.

We don't have to be overbearing, but we need to give a clear testimony.

How much better it would have been if Abraham had been upfront about his faith.

But he chose the way of deception rather than the way of faith, and this time he got caught.

V 2 **"---and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah."**

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No doubt Abimelech had many wives, as this was common practice for kings of his day.

So under the circumstances, it was not surprising that he took Sarah.

He believed she was unmarried, and therefore legally available.

However, what was surprising is that Abimelech, who probably had a harem full of beautiful young ladies, was even *interested* in Sarah.

After all, she was 90 years old, and I don't think she used Oil of Olay.



So why would he find Sarah so attractive?

Well, scripture doesn't give us the answer to that question either, but it seems obvious to me that she didn't look 90 years old.

Yes, it seems quite possible that when God promised Abraham that Sarah would soon bear a son, He also gave her back, at least to some degree, the elements of her youth.

And certainly Abraham must have noticed a change in his wife, for he was using that old deception again to protect his life.

And I don't suppose Sarah would have been inclined to tell anyone how old she really was.

As you know, some ladies are a little sensitive about their age.

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In fact, I heard about a lady, who, upon answering her door, came face to face with the census taker.

As he proceeded to fill out his form, the inevitable question came up, *And how old would you be?*

The lady hesitated for a moment, and then said rather cautiously, *Well, I've seen 39 years.*

Looking her straight in the eye, he said, *Ah, yes, lady, and how long have you been blind?*

I think it's time to get back to Genesis 20.

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Well, God didn't waste any time in halting this disastrous situation.

Sarah was soon to be the mother of the son of promise, and even though her husband

had been very negligent, she was still under God's care.

V 3 **"But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife."**

If there was no other guide in scripture to enlighten us concerning God's views on adultery (and indeed there is), this one verse would be sufficient in itself.

As a pagan king, Abimelech considered it his right to have more than one wife.

And although God has never approved of bigamy, He did not take him to task about that sin.

But when it came to the sin of taking another man's wife, God simply said

"thou art but a dead man," and that was that.

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V 4-6 "But Abimelech had not come near her:  
and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also  
a righteous nation?  
5: Said he not unto me, She is my  
sister? and she, even she herself said,  
He is my brother: in the integrity of  
my heart and innocency of my hands have  
I done this.  
6: 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:  
therefore suffered I thee not to touch  
her."

Although Abimelech was probably an idol  
worshipper, and certainly did not know

the true God, he was still responsible to God for the light he had.

Yes, now that Abimelech knew the truth, He must correct his error, and as quickly as possible, or he would face death.

V 7 **"Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine."**

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In spite of Abraham's disgraceful conduct, God still honoured him as His prophet. What tremendous grace on God's part, but what a terrible testimony on Abraham's part.

And I'm sure, after that terrible dream, Abimelech was shaking in his boots, but

he was not about to ask this man to pray for him.

In fact, he gave God's prophet a piece of his mind.

V 8-10 **"Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.**

**9: Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.**

**10: And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?"**

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Yes, he gave him both barrels, and Abraham deserved it.

**"What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?"**

Well, Abraham really didn't have a good answer to that question, but I'm sure a full apology would have been in order. However, instead of admitting his wrong, he made excuses.

V 11-12 **"And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.**

**12: And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."**

Abraham was definitely not at his best.

First of all, he insults the man by telling him, *I thought you'd kill me and steal my wife.*

Now, that might have been true had not God interfered, but I don't think this accusation made a very good impression on the king.

Then to top it all off, he said, *Well, actually I didn't lie. You see, my wife is my half-sister.*

Now that phoney excuse would have been bad enough, but Abraham kept right on talking, and the more he talked, the worse it got.

V 13 **"And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me;**



**at every place whither we shall come,  
say of me, He is my brother."**

So now the truth was out.

This wasn't just the second time he had  
lied; it was only the second time he  
had gotten caught.

Apparently he had used this ploy many times,  
and most of the time, no one had called  
his bluff.

We all know that he should have gotten rid  
of this secret arrangement when he  
returned from Egypt, but he still kept  
it around in case of emergencies.

So, whenever things got a little dangerous,  
he relied upon deception rather than  
trusting God for his protection.

What a blight it had been on Abraham's life!

But despite this secret sin in his life, God had not rejected him--"he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee."

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V 14-16 "And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

15: And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

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 reproved."

One has to wonder why Abimelech was so generous with a man that he obviously despised.

Certainly his words to Sarah did not hide his contempt for the couple.

**"Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver."**

Yes, with tongue in cheek, Abimelech called Abraham **"thy brother."**

Clearly he was mocking Abraham's feeble excuse.

And even though Abimelech would not lower himself to ask any favours of this prophet, he did treat him generously, for he knew that he needed his prayers.

V 17-18 **"So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children."**

**18: For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife."**

I'm sure that Abimelech was impressed with this man's answers to prayer, but I really doubt that he ever had any respect for Abraham after this fiasco. And although Abraham had prospered once again, I'm sure he deeply regretted his actions, and we never read that he followed that path of deception again. I think this time we can safely say--Abraham had learned his lesson.

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Someone has said *It is always darkest before the dawn*, and in Abraham's case, that was certainly true.

In spite of his poor showing, God continued with His plan to give him that special son.

Abraham and Sarah had been in Canaan for about 25 years, and all that time they had been expectantly waiting for their son of promise.

So you can imagine their joy when he finally arrived!

Genesis 21:1-2 **"And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.**

**2: For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him."**

As you will notice, V 1 emphasizes the point that God's promises never fail, for He always keeps His word.

For He **"visited Sarah as he had said,"** and  
He **"did unto Sarah as he had spoken."**

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In Romans 4, we get a pretty good idea of  
Abraham and Sarah's physical condition  
shortly before this miracle happened.

Romans 4:19 **"And being not weak in faith,  
he considered not his own body now  
dead, when he was about an hundred  
years old, neither yet the deadness of  
Sara's womb."**

Now I realize that Abraham and Sarah's aged  
physical condition was no obstacle to  
God's ability to bring forth their  
miracle son.

However, although He could have used them  
just as they were, it seems He did not.  
Comparing scripture with scripture, it soon  
becomes apparent that God made a few

changes to that elderly couple before the birth.

Yes, it certainly seems that God prepared Abraham and Sarah physically for this upcoming event.

As we have already noticed in Chapter 20, Abimelech was attracted to Abraham's wife, even though she was 90 years old. And once again, Abraham was getting edgy about the possibility that someone might steal his wife.

So it seems obvious that God had renewed Sarah's youth, at least to some degree. She had been rejuvenated at least to the point where she could give birth naturally, and, as we will see later, she was also able to nurse her new baby.

And it seems that God was also doing a little work on Abraham.

Romans 4 tells us that Abraham had reached the point physically, because of age, that his body was **"now dead"** as far as procreation was concerned.

However, something definitely changed, for in a very short time, he was able to father Isaac, and, after Sarah's death, he married Keturah, and had six more sons.

Oh yes, I think God had knocked a few years from their lives.

V 3-5 **"And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.**

**4: And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.**



**5: And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him."**

Abraham made sure that his son was circumcised on the eighth day.

Certainly this son must be legally qualified to receive all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

And I'm sure, as Isaac grew older, Abraham would have made him very aware of the blessings that were his.

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As you will remember, Abraham had laughed for joy when God announced the soon arrival of his son.

As a result of Abraham's faith, God called his son "**Isaac**," which means laughter. Now it was Sarah's turn to join her husband's rejoicing.

V 6 "And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

7: And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age."

Don't you find it a little strange that Sarah said "**I have born him a son in his old age**"?

Why didn't she say, *I have born him a son in my old age?*

Maybe I should just let that one pass.

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Back when Abraham started calling himself "**a father of many nations,**" I wouldn't be surprised if his neighbours chuckled a little behind his back: *Poor old*

*fellow. He's nearly 100 years old, you know!*

But now everyone had changed their minds. They looked at little Isaac on Sarah's lap and laughed *with* them, not *at* them. What a vindication of their faith this little fellow had turned out to be!

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V 8 **"And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned."**

Isaac would probably be about three years old when he was weaned, and his half-brother Ishmael would be about 17 or 18.

On that special day, his proud father would be bustling about making sure that everything was in order for this grand celebration.

No doubt all his servants, and, of course,  
the near neighbours would have been  
invited.

Oh what a happy day it would be, as Abraham  
and Sarah looked back on that blessed  
event, and anticipated God's promises  
in the future.

So, as the family is enjoying this special  
celebration, why don't we spend a  
little time thinking about the glorious  
ways Isaac had been made a type of  
Christ?

I think everyone is so busy talking, they  
won't even miss us!

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As we have already noticed, God had planned  
that Isaac's parents would be so old  
when he was born that he would be a  
*miracle* baby.

This, of course, made him a perfect type of God's Son Who was miraculously born of a virgin.

But there is another way in which this long delay made Isaac a type of Christ.

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Throughout the centuries, many godly individuals had looked for Christ's coming.

In fact, ever since God promised that the "**seed**" of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, faithful men have longed for God's salvation.

And God kept this hope alive.

In Acts 3:22 we read, "**For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye**

**hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you."**

And in Isaiah 53, the prophet wrote a whole chapter about God's Suffering Servant. I'm sure His words brightened the hopes of the faithful, but still God's Son did not come.

Then Micah foretold that Christ's birth would be in Bethlehem.

As a result of these encouragements, the faithful looked longingly for His coming, right up to the time of Christ's birth.

Yes, old Simeon, who met Mary and Joseph in the Temple, had been **"waiting for the consolation of Israel,"** and Anna, the prophetess, upon seeing the baby Jesus, **"spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."**

Oh yes, many of the faithful looked with  
*longing* for His coming.

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And for 25 long years after Abraham and  
Sarah entered Canaan, they longed for a  
son.

Yes, Isaac was the *long awaited* son who so  
perfectly typified Israel's *long*  
*awaited* Messiah.

Well, we better get back to the celebration  
before are missed.

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V 9 **"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the  
Egyptian, which she had born unto  
Abraham, mocking."**

So this wonderful day of celebration did not  
last long before the shadows of discord  
began to creep in.

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We will find that Ishmael was not a  
spiritual person.

No, his aspirations were centred on earthly  
things.

True, Abraham had circumcised Ishmael, and  
so under God's conditions, he would  
have been eligible to receive the  
benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant.

And he had been raised in a home where God's  
name was honoured.

But godly parents do not always guarantee  
godly children.

So, although Ishmael bore the outward signs  
of godliness, he would turn out to be a  
man of the world.

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But, in spite of these personal tendencies,  
the division in Ishmael's home could  
not have been blamed on him.



He had been born as a result of Abraham and Sarah's *interference* in God's plans. So, right from the start, their actions had resulted in discord.

First of all, Hagar despised her mistress. And although she eventually returned to her duty and was subject unto Sarah, I don't think their relationship was ever a good one.

However, I'm sure, as time went on, that Ishmael also contributed to the problem.

No doubt he had always counted on inheriting his father's estate, for according to the custom of that day, he was the legal heir.

But now that Sarah had a son of her own, his prospects were severely threatened.

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I'm sure Ishmael knew that God had given him  
his own personal blessing.

Hagar would have often told him about her  
encounter with "**the angel of the LORD.**"

And she would have told him that God was  
going to make him a *great* man in the  
earth.

But being the kind of person he was, his  
affections would be much more set upon  
his father's wealth than any benefits  
God might bring him.

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But, with the birth of Isaac, all his dreams  
were compromised.

Just like his mother's aspirations of  
grandeur, his own plans were going all  
wrong.

And certainly he would have been fully aware  
of God's promises to Isaac.

After all, he had been somewhere about when his father had received the three heavenly visitors.

So while Abraham and Sarah anticipated God's promise with delight, Hagar and Ishmael dreaded the day of its fulfillment.

And now, with everyone making such a fuss about his little brother's party, his anger finally boiled over.

We don't know what Ishmael did to mock his brother, but it must've been quite spiteful, and I'm sure Ishmael would have preferred to keep it quiet, but he got caught.

V 9 **"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking."**

As far as Sarah was concerned, this was the last straw.

She was determined to put an end to it once  
and for all.

But Abraham and Sarah were deeply divided on  
the issue, and one wonders how it will  
all turn out.

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Next week then . . . God steps in to resolve  
an irresolvable problem.