

Genesis 20 - Abraham Lies About Sarah Again

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

1. (1-2) Abraham lies in a similar manner as before.
 - a. **Abraham journeyed from there to the South:** After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved. Perhaps he did not want to live in the hills overlooking the destroyed region any longer, and be reminded of those people and the judgment visited upon them.
 - b. **Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."** Abraham's concern was probably not because Sarah looked like a young beauty at 90 years of age. We can surmise that she was reasonably attractive at that age, but more importantly she was connected to one of the richest and most influential men of the region. In that day, a harem was more of a political statement than a romantic statement.
 - i. We should not ignore the idea of Sarah's attractiveness even in old age. "She had in some measure been physically rejuvenated, in order to conceive, bear, and nurse Isaac, and possibly this manifested itself in renewed beauty as well." (Morris)
 - c. **She is my sister:** This is the same lie Abraham told back in Genesis 12:10-13. He shows that it is all too easy to slip back into sinful habits. Abraham stumbles in a place he stumbled before. Instead of trusting God to keep his family together, he devised his own plan to do it. His plan will fail completely.
 - i. Age does not automatically sanctify us. Unless yielded to the Spirit of God, we will repeat in our old age the sinful patterns of our youth.
2. (3-7) God threatens judgment upon Abimelech for taking Sarah.
 - a. **Indeed you are a dead man:** This is a scary thing to hear from God, even in a dream. But the point had to be made to Abimelech, even though he could truly say he was acting **in the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands.**
 - i. This may seem drastic, but the stakes were high. "Suppose Abimelech had taken Sarah and God had not intervened? Two seeds would have been at the door to Sarah's womb, and to this day an element of doubt would cling to the ancestry of our Lord." (Barnhouse)
 - b. **I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart:** Because Abimelech's **heart** was right in this regard, God kept him from worse sin. God's protecting power can guide even a pagan king.
 - i. Despite Abraham's failure to really trust God in the situation, God was not going to abandon him. He would not *let* Abimelech touch Sarah. That womb was going to bring forth the son of promise, who would eventually bring forth God's Messiah. God wasn't leaving this matter up to man!
 - c. **For he is a prophet, and he will pray for you:** Even though Abraham is in sin, he is still **a prophet** and man of powerful prayer. God's mercy did not leave Abraham, even though Abraham didn't trust God the way he should.

B. Abraham is rebuked again.

1. (8-10) Abraham (just like last time) suffers rebuke from a heathen king.
 - a. **You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done:** It is sad to see that Abimelech - the pagan king - is in the right, and Abraham - the man of God is in the wrong, and Abimelech tells Abraham so.

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

2. (11-13) Abraham's excuse.

a. **Surely the fear of God is not in the place:** This was Abraham's excuse for his sinful deception.

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

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

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

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

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

a. **Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham:** In showing such generosity to Abraham, Abimelech is essentially heaping coals of fire on Abraham's head (Romans 12:20). Abraham should have been giving gifts to Abimelech, because he was in the wrong.

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

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

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



References: The Bible, David
Guzik and Donald Barnhouse