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## OPENING COMMENT

The first time Abraham passed off Sarah as his sister did not go as planned, so it is a curiosity as to why he would try it again. Instead of learning from the fiasco in Egypt, Abraham has a faithless moment and relies on his own assessment of the situation to get him through. Although Abraham would probably be embarrassed for this story to be found in the pages of Holy scripture, it does give us some keen insights into the nature of interpersonal sin and the character of God. Both Abraham and Abimelech are lucky that the God of Abraham is a covenant keeping, merciful God.

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## READ THE TEXT: Genesis 20:1-21:7

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

<sup>8</sup>So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have



you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.”<sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you see, that you did this thing?”<sup>11</sup> Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, ‘There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’<sup>12</sup> Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.<sup>13</sup> And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, “He is my brother.”’”

<sup>14</sup> Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him.<sup>15</sup> And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.<sup>18</sup> For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

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

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Who kept Abimelech from sinning? (vs. 6)
2. Who would Abimelech sinned against, should he have taken Sarah as he intended? (vs. 6)
3. What was Abraham's reason for making the same mistake a second time? (vs. 11)
4. Did Abraham lie, either time, about his relationship to Sarah?
5. What was required for Abimelech to be healed (vs. 17)
6. What is the theme of Chapter 21:1-2?
7. What is Abraham's response in verse 3 and 4?



## APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Abimelech's potential sin was not primarily against Abraham or Sarah, but God himself. How might this truth impact our perspective on our interactions and relationships with those around us?
2. Abraham's excuse for not telling the truth was motivated by his evaluation of the godlessness of the culture he found himself in. How might we fall into the same sin Abraham did? How might that impact the decisions we make? How might we begin to battle that impulse?
3. God struck Abimelech's family with infertility, but it was only through the prayer of Abraham that he was rid of the curse. How might inform our perspective on prayer and its purpose?
4. The first two verses in chapter 21 clearly outline God has faithful to his promise, in his perfect timing. This is a lesson that took decades to learn with many mistakes along the way. How does this reality encourage us as we walk the path laid before us? How might it help us encourage those around us?
5. Why is Abraham's response of obedience important for us to note? How does obedience work as sign of a real faith? Where do we struggle to be obedient to the call and commands of God?

## BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 12:10-20 – Abraham's first attempt at passing Sarah off as his sister.
2. Genesis 39:9 – Joseph equates sleeping with Potiphar's wife as sinning against God, not Potiphar.
3. Samuel 11 – David's sin with Bathsheba is considered to be a sin against God.
4. Psalm 51:4 – confirms David's sin as being against God.
5. Romans 12:9-21 – outline marks of a true Christian.
6. James 1-2 – Faith with works is dead.

## CONCLUSION

It is curious to discover that Abimelech's sin against Abraham was actually, and primarily a sin against God. This should radically change our view on those wrongs, as little as they may seem, we perpetrate on those living around us. The little white lies, minor frauds, and innocent gossips are not simply a sin against our brother, but a sin committed against a perfectly Holy God. The wrongs committed around the board room table (or kitchen table for that matter) have a cosmic audience and spiritual implication. We would be wise to remind ourselves of this and dig into more clearly understanding why this is a reality.

Secondly, it is important for us to see that Abraham's righteousness was accounted to him because of his faith (Gen 15:6), but it resulted in significant obedience. This is a marker of true faith. Faith should be evidenced in the obedience, or works, that we accomplish by the power of the Spirit. It is



comforting to know that Abraham was not perfect, but it is sobering to note that he was radically obedient in response to the faithfulness of God. This should stand as a reminder for us to examine our lives and see if the fruits of faith are actually present.

## **SHARE & PRAY**

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### **LIFE GROUP VISION:**

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

