

• *Abraham journeys to Gerar*

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham travelled towards the Negev, in the south of Israel. He journeys to the area between Kadesh (in the south of Canaan) and Shur (in the Sinai peninsula), and then he turns to the northwest and stays for a while in Gerar. While in Gerar he does the same thing as he had done in Egypt many years before.

• *History repeated*

It is like the story of Abraham and Pharaoh ^{☐1} all over again, though there are many differences (the places, the kings, their characters, the circumstances, the way in which the kings find out the truth, the reactions of Abraham, and the final attitude of the kings, are all different).

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After the tremendous call to godliness in Genesis 17:1–2, and the great praying of Genesis 18:16–33, we expect the life of Abraham to go rapidly forward and we expect that we shall soon be told the story of the birth of the miracle-child. But to our surprise we find Abraham falling back into the same old weakness that we have read about at the beginning of his story ^{☐1}. He seems to have made little progress since the days of his first arrival in Canaan! Worse still, having just been told clearly that it will be Sarah that will give birth to the miracle-child, he now risks the birth of the child by letting Sarah be taken into the harem of another pagan king.

• *The same old weakness*

The result is the same as before! Abimelech, like Pharaoh, takes Sarah into his harem ^{☐1}. She is older than before and is no longer called beautiful ^{☐2}, but even in her nineties she is good looking! The ages of Abraham and Sarah are perplexing. Either their lives are spread out to about twice their natural length, in which case Sarah is the equivalent of a 45-year old mature woman. Or some kind of number system based on six rather than ten, is being used, in which case Sarah is the equivalent of a 54-year old woman. Whichever way it is, she is good looking!

• *Sarah – ‘good-looking’ at ninety*

• *God warns Abimelech in a dream*

God warns Abimelech in a dream ^{☐1}, and Abimelech is eager to clear himself ^{☐2}. Although as a matter of sheer fact he has sinned, it was totally unintentional (which lets us know that sin can be committed when there is no knowledge of it and no sinful intention. Sin is an objective matter; it is not just a question of intention).

• *God’s protection for Sarah*

God had protected Abimelech and had protected Sarah ^{☐1}. Abimelech explains what has happened to the royal household ^{☐2}, rebukes Abraham for his deceit and demands an explanation ^{☐3}. Abraham makes feeble excuses ^{☐4}. Abimelech gives many gifts to Abraham, gives Sarah back and invites Abraham to live where he wants in his territory ^{☐5}. He apologises to Sarah ^{☐6}. Finally Abraham prays for the wives of Abimelech who had become barren during this period. They are healed and all is well ^{☐7}.

• *Slow learners- Abraham and us!*

It is a rebuke to Abraham’s persistent proneness to deceit. We have all made mistakes, and we have all made the same mistake more than once! We are slow to learn, and have weak points which lead us astray again and again. Our weak points need firm handling. They need to be eradicated firmly and permanently. Abraham is showing an area where

^{☐1}
see 12:10–20

^{☐1}
see 12:10–20

^{☐1} 20:2
^{☐2} contrast
12:11

^{☐1} 20:3
^{☐2} 20:4–5

^{☐1} 20:6–7
^{☐2} 20:8
^{☐3} 20:9–10
^{☐4} 20:11–13
^{☐5} 20:14–15
^{☐6} 20:16
^{☐7} 20:17–18

• *Proneness to deceit – Abraham’s character weakness*

2. Abraham was again guilty of needless suspicion

• *Abraham’s carelessness*

• *Abraham has to pray for those he has wronged*

3. Abraham again has to learn the sovereignty of God’s ways

• *A warning against indiscriminate ‘taking by faith’*

• *Abraham prayed for others and his prayer for himself was answered*

he is not ‘walking before Yahweh’. One would think that the disgrace that fell on Abraham in Egypt ¹ would be enough for him to know that God was not blessing his trick about pretending Sarah was his sister. But he has not yet faced his proneness to needless deceit, and his inconsiderateness towards Sarah.

2. **Abraham was again guilty of needless suspicion.** Abraham took it for granted, without any real foundation for his suspicions, that Abimelech would kill Abraham. Often the ungodly are not as ungodly as one might think, and the godly are not as godly as one might think! Actually Abimelech is more honest, generous and courteous in these events than one would have expected. In Sodom there was great wickedness but in Gerar the king, although having a harem, lived in the fear of God ¹. Lot imagined there was some good in Sodom and was badly mistaken. Abraham imagined that the rulers of Gerar would be murderous but he was wrong. He was careless about getting the facts, careless about telling the truth, careless about his faith in God’s protection and careless about his wife’s honour and dignity.

Abraham had to see that he was entirely wrong to have had such suspicions. They were entirely without justification. He has to pray for the people whom he had wronged and when he prays for them, they receive healing.

3. The fact that the barren wives of Abimelech receive healing is odd, because Abraham has been praying for his own barren wife for twenty years and more. **Abraham again has to learn the sovereignty of God’s ways and especially of His timing.** Evidently Abraham could pray for others’ wives but prayer for his own wife was not answered! God is sovereign in giving His gifts. Every kind of gift is given ‘as He wills’ ¹. Even to Jesus it was said ‘He delivered others ... let Him deliver Himself...’. This ought to warn us away from ‘taking by faith’ blessings that maybe God is not giving! Even in the greatest miracles we have to submit to the will of God. We cannot ‘take’ miracles or switch on God’s blessings at will.

What is also noticeable is that when Abraham prayed for the wives of others, fairly soon after his own wife became pregnant. The chapter division is distracting. Immediately after Genesis 20:17–18 comes 21:1–2. When he prayed for others he received the very thing he prayed for himself.

¹ 12:10–20

¹ 20:11

¹ 1
Corinthians 12:11



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