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## **Genesis 20**

(2019)

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## Genesis 20.

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### Topics.

- Abraham journeys toward the Negeb, Kadesh, Shur and Gerar.
- Abraham tells Abimelech the king of Gerar that Sarah his wife is his sister.
- God reveals to Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife.
- God tells Abimelech He knows he has acted from the integrity of his heart.
- Abimelech asks Abraham why he brought on his kingdom a great sin.
- Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham and allows him to dwell in the land.
- Abimelech tells Sarah he has given her brother a thousand pieces of silver.
- Abraham prays and God heals Abimelech, his wife and his household.

**FOR INFORMATION:** concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

**The previous chapter:** in chapter nineteen the focus was upon two angels arriving at Sodom; men surrounding Lot's house and demanding he bring his two guests out; Lot offering his two daughters to the men desiring to rape the two angels; Lot fleeing Sodom; his wife turning to a pillar of salt; the city of Sodom being destroyed and Lot's daughters becoming pregnant by him and giving birth to Moab and Ben-ammi.

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### GENESIS 20:1

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#### Abraham Journeys to Negeb, Kadesh, Shur and Gerar.

- **Genesis 20:1:** From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.

**Negeb:** is a desert region between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the south of Judea it was part of the original territory of the Amalekites (Num. 13:29) and refers to the desert region lying to the south of Judea. The physical characteristics of the Negeb are that of rolling hills which abruptly terminate in the desert region. It is bounded on the east by the Dead Sea; on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. It is a land where the water supply is scarce, because of a very meager amount of rainfall in the summer months, but at other seasons of the year streams flow across its desert sands and the nomads use it for pasturage. In this territory Hagar encountered the angel when she fled from the face of her mistress Sarah (Gen 16:7-14) and it was here that both Isaac and Jacob dwelt (Gen 24:62) (Gen 37:1). Many of David's exploits are described as happening in the Negeb, centering around Ziklag (1 Sam 27:5). After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586-585 B.C, a group of Jews retreated to the Negeb, where they were harassed by the Edomites who sided with the Babylonians.

**Kadesh:** is a wilderness that reached to the desert of the Saracens it was in this wilderness the angel of the LORD met with Hagar at the well. (Genesis 16:7) (Genesis 16:13-14)

**Shur:** is, a wilderness that joined to Egypt and the wilderness to which the people of Israel went when they passed through the Red sea. It is also the wilderness in which the angel of the LORD found Hagar by a spring of water on her way to Shur. (Genesis 16:7) (Genesis 16:13-14)

**Gerar:** (or the south as it is often called), is the territory of the Canaanites that extends from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. (Gen. 10:19). The pasture land of Gerar was a very fertile and well-watered.

**The words, "from there,"** (v1) refer to the plains or oaks of Mamre, where Abraham had lived for around fifteen or twenty years. He now moves from his encampment there and migrates to the southern border of Canaan. In the neighbourhood of Gerar which was a very fertile and well-watered pasture land.

**Reasons Abraham moved:** we are not told why Abraham left Mamre, following are two possible suggestions commentators have made:

1. He could not bear the stench of the sulphurous lake after the total destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their beautiful fertile plains.
2. He was grieved at Lot's incest with his daughters, and the reproach which the Canaanites cast upon him because of his kinsman's shameful behaviour.

However, neither of these suggestions are likely because of the distance between Mamre and Sodom and Gomorrah. The most likely reason, is that it was Abraham's lifestyle not to remain in one place too long, but to travel for some-time, settle for a while and eventually pull up the tent pegs and move on from place to place, partly to feed his very large stock of cattle and also because by so doing he was obeying the call of God on his life to be a sojourner in the land.

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## GENESIS 20:2

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### **Abraham tells Abimelech that Sarah His Wife is His Sister.**

- **Genesis 20:2:** And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

The first time Abraham told Sarah to say she is his sister is recorded in Genesis chapter twelve was when he went down to Egypt and she was taken into Pharaoh's house. (Gen. 12:10-16). In the following chapter we read that the LORD visited Sarah and she conceived and bore Abraham a son and Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. (Gen. 21:1-5). We know that Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham which means at this time she was eighty-nine years of age and yet Abimelech king of Gerar sends for her with the intention of taking her to his bedroom. This means that even at eighty-nine she was still a good-looking woman. Many wonder, how can this be? Some think that the agenda uppermost in Abimelech's mind was not so much the bedroom, but to gain a political alliance with the powerful sheik that had entered his territories and by taking Sarah to wife (believing she was Abraham's sister) he would in this way achieve his goal. At the end of the following chapter we do read of Abraham and Abimelech making a covenant that Abraham, would deal kindly with Abimelech and Abimelech would deal kindly with Abraham. (Gen. 21:22-32).

**NOTE:** Abraham as well as being a man of faith was also highly skilled in war, he with 318 trained men defeated the armies of Chedorlaomer the king of Elam and the armies of the three kings who were with him, and rescued Lot and all the people with him and brought back all their possessions. (Gen. 14:14-17).

This means that Abraham as well as being a man of great faith was also a great warrior, so it is certainly possible that Abimelech's prime agenda was to gain Abraham's favour.

**It should be mentioned:** this is the only time we read of Abraham taking up the role of a military commander and warrior and the only war we ever read of that Abraham is engaged in. It is important to note that he was not motivated by ambition or the lust for power or greed or to gain control over other kingdoms and thereby increase his riches and wealth as Chedorlaomer and the three kings with him were, but was motivated by charity, because of his love and compassion toward Lot and his family in their distress. (Gen. 14:14-16). Though it is possible Abimelech's reason for taking Sarah may have been to gain Abraham's favour since he had been deceived into believing he was Sarah's brother, this should not rule out the fact that she may still have been a beautiful woman. Consider the following, she gave birth to Isaac when she was ninety years old (Gen. 17:17) and people during these early generations had far longer lifespans than we do today.

- Abraham's lived 175 years (Gen. 25:7).
- Sarah lived 127 years (Gen. 23:1)
- Isaac lived 180 years (Gen. 35:28).
- Jacob lived 147 years (Gen. 47:28).

These long lifespans mean that Sarai's age corresponds with around forty or fifty years in modern times, as she was at this time about half the age to which the people of that age lived. Added to this she was coming from a mountainous country; she had not given birth to any children; God was favouring her and besides all this many women's beauty does not vanish simply because they are somewhat past their younger years. Added to this we do not know what age Abimelech king of Gerar was. But even more than all of these, is the very likely possibility that God renewed her youth when He promised her a son or at least kept her youthful knowing she would be giving birth in her later years.

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## GENESIS 20:3-5

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### **God Reveals to Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife.**

- **Genesis 20:3-5:** 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."

**God came to Abimelech in a dream:** (v3) the LORD had previously protected Sarah from Pharaoh's desire to have her (Gen. 12:17) and now protects her from Abimelech. He revealed himself to Abimelech in a dream during the night. This is not a random dream, but a dream that God put into his mind to warn him against taking Sarah to be his wife so that no wrong would be done to a virtuous woman such as Sarah to which she was exposed through the weakness of her husband. During these ancient Old Testament times God not only used to supernaturally manifest His mind in dreams to His servants the prophets and His people for their sake, but would at various times also manifest it to heathens for their sakes or for the sake of His people.

**Behold, you are a dead man:** (v3) verse seventeen says, "God healed Abimelech," which means that the statement, "You are a dead man," is better read, "You are dying." Abimelech was already suffering from a deadly plague within his body that is spoken of in, verse seventeen when the LORD appeared to him here and warned him that death would be the

result if he did not return Sarah to Abraham. Though Abimelech had not yet committed any uncleanness with Sarah God would punish him with death if he did not return her to Abraham her husband.

**She is a man's wife:** (v3) and therefore it was unlawful for him to take her to be his wife, the magnitude of the punishment God was prepared to inflict upon Abimelech and his household shines a light upon how much God hates a breach of marriage and by extension adultery.

**In the integrity of my heart:** (v3) Abimelech question, "LORD, will you kill an innocent people?" shows that he associates his nation with himself and expects that the fatal plague will not be limited to only him. He earnestly pleads with the LORD saying that he acted from integrity. During these ancient times it was a common custom for kings to take wives to themselves, but these wives were always single woman and therefore the kings conscience was not touched with a sense of wrongdoing and though it was not God's design for marriage the practise did not bring God's wrath upon the king or his kingdom. Though what Abimelech had intended for Sarah was extremely wrong before the LORD he was innocent in regard to the sin of taking another man's wife, since he would never have done such a wicked thing had he not be deceived into believing Sarah was Abraham's sister. God seeing the integrity of his heart understood this truth and acquitted him. When we act against God's will and His ways, we will eventually bring trouble upon ourselves and upon others. God gave Abimelech warning that his sin would lead to his death as does all conscious and willful sin. Abimelech was ignorant of the great sin he was about to commit and therefore his conscience did not witness against him. If we willfully continue in sin when our consciences witness against us we will bring God's condemnation upon ourselves. In contrast to this it should be of great comfort to those who are honest to know that God sees their honesty, and will take it into account when they have unknowingly entered into a temptation and sinned against Him. However, if we have ignorantly done wrong and continue to persist in doing it our ignorance will not excuse us. Whether king, prince or peasant, those that do wrong will receive judgment according to the wrong they have done, unless they repent of it and where possible make restitution.

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## GENESIS 20:6-8

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### God tells Abimelech He knows He has Acted from Integrity.

- **Genesis 20:6-8:** 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.

**Abimelech rose early:** (v8) it is certain that once the dream had ended Abimelech thoughts were raging in his head after what the LORD had revealed to him, and also certain that he could no longer sleep and as soon as it was light he rose from his bed and assembled his household servants and especially his counsellors who had advised him to take Sarah for his wife and assisted in bringing her to him. He told them that the LORD in a dream had told him that Sarah was another man's wife, and that if he did not immediately return her to her husband, he and all who belonged to him would die. Naturally all who heard him were struck with fear. It is very possible that they upon hearing this fearful news recalled to mind the burning destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and feared that a similar catastrophe would come upon them.

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## GENESIS 20:9-13

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## **Abimelech asks Abraham why He Brought a Sin on His Kingdom.**

- **Genesis 20:9-13:** 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.'"

Abimelech, no doubt still filled with fear and dread calls Abraham to him and protests against him for leading him into a great sin asking him why would he lie and deceive him in such a wicked way. Abraham tells Abimelech that he had thought that the fear of God was not amongst Abimelech's kingdom and therefore he believed that his life would be in danger on account of his wife, meaning he feared men would kill him so that they could take her to themselves and therefore to protect himself he would tell everyone she was his sister. Even though Abraham had learned to trust in the LORD to bring to pass His promises it seems he did not have the same trust in the smaller things of daily life.

Much like we as Christians can have great faith in Christ for our eternal salvation, but lack the same great faith for the smaller things of our daily lives. It seems that Abraham did not think that what he did was so extremely wrong since it was to protect his life. He tries to defend his wrongdoing by telling Abimelech that Sarah was in reality his sister, the daughter of his father, though not the daughter of his mother and she became his wife. (v12), but regardless of this truth it does not excuse the fact that he by his deception not only put the virtue of Sarah in danger, but also the life of Abimelech and his household. The lesson to learn from this story is that before the LORD there is no excuse for deceiving others.

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## **GENESIS 20:14-15**

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### **Abimelech Returns Sarah to Abraham and they Dwell in the Land.**

- **Genesis 20:14-15:** 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."

Abimelech accepted Abraham's apology, it is possible that he felt that there was some truth in the character Abraham gave of his people and that there was a justifiable reason for him to fear for his life. Whatever Abimelech thought, he clearly showed he had forgiven Abraham by his gift of livestock and servants and allowing him to dwell in his land wherever he pleased.

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## **GENESIS 20:16**

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### **Abimelech Gave Sarah Brother a Thousand Pieces of Silver.**

- **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."

The King James Bible says:

- To 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.

A thousand pieces of silver, most likely refers to a thousand shekels of silver the common form of currency, this was a very large sum of money at this time. The English Standard Bible ends by saying, Sarah was vindicated, whereas the King James Bible says Sarah was reproved which means we need to see what the word reproved means in Hebrew, it comes from the Hebrew word (*yakach*) and literally means, to be right or correct, to justify or convict, to chasten, rebuke and reprove. This means that both the King James Bible and the English Standard Bible are correct. So, let's look at both separately and then see if we can harmonise them.

### **The English Standard Bible**

- 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." (Gen. 20:16).

Presents Sarah as being innocent and vindicated from any wrongdoing with this in mind Abimelech's the reason for telling Sarah that he had given Abraham a thousand shekels of silver was firstly, so she would know that he held nothing against her or Abraham and secondly, so that all who were with her would know that she was fully vindicated by the king and had done nothing wrong sexually.

### **The King James Bible.**

- To 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. (Gen. 20:16).

Some suggest that the words, "He is to thee a covering of the eyes," refers to a veil as a covering much like Rebekah put on her veil and covered herself when she saw Isaac approaching (Gen. 24:65). They suspect that Abimelech was telling Sarah that he had given her brother a thousand pieces of silver so she could buy many veils for herself and all the woman with her so that they could cover themselves and thereby prevent men from looking with desire and sexual intent upon her and her maid servants. Though it is true woman of this era did wear veils to cover themselves a thousand pieces of silver is a lot of money to buy veils, added to this verse says, "He is the covering," meaning Abraham is the covering. It is far more likely that Abimelech was saying that Abraham being Sarah's husband is her covering, in that had king Abimelech and his servants who brought Sarah to him known Sarah was a married woman they would not have entertained the idea of taking her to the king and the king would certainly not have look upon her with any intention of lying with her. Abimelech also refers to Abraham as her brother and not her husband so there maybe within his words a subtitle reprimanding for her dishonesty and concealment of the truth that she was a married woman. It seems that Abimelech was reproving Sarah for saying that Abraham was her brother and admonishing her to be more prudent in the future and never again conceal her identity as a married woman and put other men in danger of the LORD'S wrath. As Sarah's husband Abraham would have been the protector of her and her chastity (had he not deceived) from any other man desiring her and attempting to take her for their own since they would know her to be the wife of another man and as such treat her with respect due to a married woman. Even in the secular world today when single men (with integrity) are looking for a female partner and see a woman at work or at some other place that they feel they could be attracted to; they firstly look at her finger to see if she is married or single. It is in this same way that Abraham was a covering to Sarah, but because of his deception that covering was removed.

**Conclusion:** can the verses of the English Standard Bible and the King James Bible be harmonised? Neither interpretation is wrong since both contain a truth, the English Standard Bible presents Abimelech as vindicating Sarah from any sexual wrongdoing which she was innocent of, while the King James Bible presents Abraham as Sarah's covering which he would have been had he not said, "Sarah was his sister," and by doing

so deceived king Abimelech and removed Sarah's covering. Abraham's life would have been protected without the deception if he had trusted God to protect him, when we use deception and lies to for our own advantage or gain it not only brings shame to ourselves, but will also bring dishonour to God. Let us always pray that we will forever speak the truth.

- These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace. (Zechariah 8:16).
- Put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephes. 4:25).

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## GENESIS 20:17-18

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### God Heals Abimelech, His Wife and His Household.

- **Genesis 20:17-18:** 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.

Abraham's deception not only lead to Abimelech's wife and female slaves being made barren, but also lead to Abimelech himself being inflicted with some type of terminal illness (v3). Some commentators point out the fact that all of this happened between Sarah's conception of Isaac and his birth and therefore there would not be a long enough space of time for anyone to know that the women had been made barren since there would be no visible sign of pregnancy. However, this is not necessarily so, since it is very possible the woman was inflicted with some type of plague or tumour in the secret parts that prevented them from cohabitation and consequently from all hopes of conception and child-bearing, until such things were healed.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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