

# **Genesis 18:1-15, 20:1-18, 21:1-7—Despite God’s Repeated Promises, Abraham And Sarah Have Trouble Believing**

## **Memory Verse**

Genesis 15:6 NLT—*Justification by faith*

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

## **Introduction**

The last time God appeared to Abraham was in Genesis chapter 17, only three months prior to His appearance to Abraham here in Genesis chapter 18. In both these encounters with God, Abraham and Sarah are reminded and reassured by God of His promise that they will have a son together. God repeats His promises because, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

## **Outline (Genesis 18:1-15, 20:1-18, 21:1-7)**

1. God appears to Abraham again to repeat the promise that Abraham would have a son by Sarah (Genesis 18:1-15)
2. Despite God’s repeated encouragement, Abraham quickly falls back into unbelief and sin (Genesis 20:1-18)
3. After 25 years the promise is fulfilled—Isaac is born (Genesis 21:1-7)

## **Genesis 18:1-15, 20:1-18, 21:1-7 NKJV**

**Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, <sup>3</sup> and said, “My Lord, if I have now found favour in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. <sup>4</sup> Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.”**

**They said, “Do as you have said.”**

**<sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup> And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.**

**<sup>9</sup> Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?”**

**So he said, “Here, in the tent.”**

**<sup>10</sup> And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.”**

**(Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**

**<sup>13</sup> And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”**

**<sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid.**

**And He said, “No, but you did laugh!”**

20:1 And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. 2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."

4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."

6 And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

11 And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. 12 But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "

14 Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." 16 Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.

17 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; 18 for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

### **1. God appears to Abraham again to repeat the promise that Abraham would have a son by Sarah**

v 1 Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day: It's another hot summers day in the dry climate of southern Israel. Mamre is a site near Hebron, south of Jerusalem, about 40 km WNW of the town of Engedi, which is situated on the shores of the Dead Sea.

v 1 **Then the LORD:** “We can assume that this was God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, appearing to Abraham before His incarnation and birth at Bethlehem. We assume this because of God the Father it says, No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18), and no man has ever seen God in the Person of the Father (1 Timothy 6:16). Therefore, if God appeared to someone in human appearance in the Old Testament (and no one has seen God the Father) it makes sense the appearance is of the eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, before His incarnation in Bethlehem.” (David Guzik)

v 2 **So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground:** This time Jesus is accompanied by two angels. All three of them appear in the form of men. The two angels will later be sent on to Sodom to rescue Lot and his family. Abraham demonstrates great humility as he runs to meet them and bows down to them. It's likely that Abraham recognised Jesus from the previous occasions that He appeared to him.

v 3-8 **[Abraham] said, “My Lord, if I have now found favour in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. <sup>4</sup> Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.” They said, “Do as you have said.” <sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup> And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate:** This is typical Middle Eastern hospitality. What sets this apart from others, is that Abraham, the master of the house, actually does most of the work himself (with Sarah helping as well). This again demonstrates his humility—Abraham is not above doing the work of a servant. He had over 300 servants whom he could have ordered around, but he didn't. Abram also made sure that his guests received the very best he had to offer—whether or not he knew that he was serving God Himself, he wanted to make sure that he gave his very best to his guests.

*Application:* Do I go out of my way to make sure that I only give to God my very best?

v 9-10a **Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” So he said, “Here, in the tent.” <sup>10</sup> And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.”:** In Genesis chapter 17, God had appeared to Abraham, announcing Isaac's birth one year before he was to be born (see Genesis 17:21). It is now about 3 months later. God will tell Abraham and Sarah that they will Isaac will be born according to the “time of life” (see v 10), meaning in about 9 months time. This means that it was soon after this time that God miraculously enabled Sarah's dead womb to conceive. From what happens in Genesis chapter 20, when Abraham again gives Sarah his wife to another man, (which happens very soon after this visit from God—most likely before they realise that Sarah is pregnant), we can assume that both Abraham and Sarah are really struggling to believe this promise of God that Abraham will have a son by Sarah. So God, in His mercy, keeps reminding them and reassuring them.

*Application:* Again, this is why we need to be in the word of God every day. We need to hear the promises again and again. Why? As the Scriptures say, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Faith grows in two ways. The first is by repeatedly reminding ourselves of the promises of God that are given to us in the word of God. The second is by experiencing God keeping His promises to us in very personal ways.

v 10b-11 (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”: Abraham and Sarah must have been having a really hard time believing God’s promise for Sarah to have a son. In Genesis 17:17, Abraham laughed, but, according to Romans 4:16-22, it was a laugh of amazement at what God could do. Abraham still didn’t fully understand God’s plan, but he didn’t doubt God’s ability to do anything He wanted—Abraham believed that with God, all things are possible, even if he didn’t quite understand how or why.

v 12 **Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**: Sarah is at a different place to Abraham with regard to her faith in God. To her it seems that, because she was 89 years old, and she had gone through menopause many years ago, it would be physically impossible for her to get pregnant. She just can’t understand how it could be possible for her and Abraham to have a child by normal sexual relations. Again, it is hard for us to believe in what we can’t understand or can’t comprehend. So God will do a miracle in Sarah’s womb that will expand her horizons, that will increase her perspective, that will open her eyes to a greater understanding of God’s unlimited power. Remember, “If your problems are too big, then your understanding of God is too small.”

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*Application: God is never disappointed in us*

Consider that Abraham and Sarah had been believing and waiting for so long, yet now, right before the promise was about to be fulfilled, they started doubting. Thankfully, God is greater than our doubts. Also, God is never disappointed with us because of two reasons.

Firstly, God already knows every time we will choose to sin against Him. Disappointment only results when something doesn’t go the way we expected it to (However, this does not mean that God is not grieved or saddened when we lack the faith to believe His promises).

Secondly, God knows just how weak we are, and He makes allowances for us. It’s like parents don’t get disappointed when their 10 month old baby only walks one step for the first time: it would be silly for the parent to be expecting the baby to go straight from crawling to sprinting. Just like the parent understands their child’s weakness and makes allowances for them, so does God for His children. God understands that it takes time for us to learn to *walk in faith*. First, we have to learn to crawl in faith, then we stumble in faith, and only then do we finally grow up and “walk in faith”, when we come to understand that God’s promises are all true because God is both willing and able to keep them.

Psalm 103:13-14 NLT

“The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him. <sup>14</sup> For He knows how weak we are; He remembers we are only dust.

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*Application: Why does God make us wait?*

There is a reason for God making them wait. If it had happened any earlier, then Sarah could have said, “Well, isn’t that amazing, I was at the end of menopause, and I still got pregnant—what at the chances of that!” But God waited until all human hope, all human strength, had gone. God purposefully left it so long that there was no physical way, literally all human strength to have children was gone. What was the result? All glory goes to God and our faith grows.

Romans 4:18-21 NLT

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!”<sup>19</sup> And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. <sup>21</sup> He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever He promises.

This is often the way God works with us. He will give us a promise, or ask us to do something, but then we find that it’s physically impossible, or way beyond our ability, or we just don’t have the required resources or skills or knowledge. It’s then that God teaches us a very important lesson that we could never have learned otherwise. We’ll see what that very important lesson is in the next verses.

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v 13-15 **And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’<sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”**

**<sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid.**

**And He said, “No, but you did laugh!”**: Sarah’s laugh was different to Abraham’s laugh of amazement. It was a laugh of unbelief, and God rebuked her for it. Remember that unbelief is a sin—it is a symptom of a hard heart. Jesus also rebuked His disciples for not believing the testimony of the ladies who went to what ended up being an empty tomb—“He is not here, for He is risen” (Matthew 28:6a). Again, this followed many instances of Jesus repeatedly telling them that He would rise again on the third day.

Mark 16:14 NKJV

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

*A very important lesson*

So the lesson we learn here is very simple, yet very powerful, **“Is anything too hard for the LORD?” NO!** Again, with our simple minds, we often can’t bring ourselves to believe what we can’t understand or we can’t comprehend—from birth, we are trained and conditioned to only believe and think according to what is humanly possible. Therefore, God orchestrates these situations in our lives so that our understanding and comprehension of Him will increase—He does what we thought was impossible, so that we learn that that answer to the question, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”, is a resounding NO!

## **2. Despite God’s repeated encouragement, Abraham and Sarah quickly fall back into unbelief and sin**

Remember that God told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, Isaac, by normal sexual relations, and that he would be born in 9 months time. The following sordid account happens in this nine month period, presumably in the first six months of Sarah’s pregnancy, before she was showing obvious visible signs of being pregnant. It’s quite likely that Abraham and Sarah had sexual relations after the LORD appeared to them—*an act of faith*. However, since Sarah had stopped cycling many years ago, they would have had no way of knowing if Sarah was actually pregnant (usually a woman knows that she is

pregnant when she misses her next period). They therefore would have doubted God's promise, and decided to "run" from God: Leaving the promised land and going to a worldly place was a sign that they were no longer trusting God, that they were no longer in the will of God, that they were no longer in fellowship with God. They no longer were willing to live in a humble tent in the wilderness; they instead wanted to enjoy the luxuries of city living, living in a proper brick or stone house, with much better access to worldly fair.

If only they could have seen inside Sarah's womb, they they would have seen little Isaac be knit together by God (see Psalm 139:13-16). They would have seen that God was indeed keeping His promise—that the promise was so close to coming to fulfilment—Isaac was already conceived—if they could have waited just a few more months, then Sarah's expanding belly would be the physical confirmation that she was actually pregnant.

### **Genesis 20:1-18 NKJV**

**And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> Now 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, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."**

**<sup>4</sup> But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? <sup>5</sup> Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."**

**<sup>6</sup> And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."**

**<sup>8</sup> So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup> And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup> Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"**

**<sup>11</sup> And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. <sup>12</sup> But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "**

**<sup>14</sup> Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. <sup>15</sup> And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." <sup>16</sup> Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.**

**<sup>17</sup> So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; <sup>18</sup> for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

v 1 **And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar:** Gerar is close to Egypt. What caused Abraham to move and go to this unsafe area close to Egypt is not mentioned in the text. However, it probably had something to do with God destroying Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. Abraham probably didn't want to wake up and look at that terrible sight every morning. Maybe there was the smell of sulphur in the air. Whatever the reason, Abraham could have moved north to another area within the promised land, where he wouldn't have had to lie about Sarah being his sister.

v 2 **Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah:** The custom of Egypt and the surrounding areas, the Egyptian way of life, was for the kings or rulers to take any good looking girl or woman for themselves. If the the good looking woman was married, they they would often kill the husband and keep the wife for themselves, to become a part of their harem.

Does this feel like déjà vu? Haven't we read this before? Yes, in Genesis chapter 12, Abraham went to Egypt to avoid a famine—this was against God's command to remain in the land. Abraham, to preserve his wealth, was willing to give up his wife to another man. In this instance, we are not told the specific reason why Abraham left the promised land to head towards Egypt.

Genesis 12:10-15 NKJV

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup> And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. <sup>12</sup> Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

<sup>14</sup> So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman [Sarah] was taken to Pharaoh's house.

Let's consider the similarities of what happens here in Genesis chapter 18 to Genesis chapter 12. At both times:

1. God had just appeared to Abraham and Sarah in Physical form, confirming His promises to them.
2. Abraham comes out richer in physical possessions, but utterly humiliated.
3. God had to intervene in the affairs of men to ensure that His plan would come to pass.
4. God's will is done in their lives in spite of their weak faith, not because of them being strong in faith. All glory goes to God.
5. There is repentance and and return to fellowship or walking with God by faith.

What is amazing here is that Sarah is still stunningly beautiful, even at 90 years of age. What king would take a grandma aged woman into his harem? Sarah obviously didn't look 90. The kings intent would be to have children with her. Little did he know that: firstly, Sarah had already gone through menopause, and secondly, she was also miraculously pregnant by her "brother" husband Abraham.

Application: It's not easy being what the world calls a beautiful woman in a sinful world

Because of sin, men's sexual desire has been corrupted. It's often (but not always), the women who have been born with a body that the world defines as being "beautiful" or "appealing", that have a hard time in life. Guys will often chase them to satisfy their own lustful desires. Nothing has changed over time. A beautiful woman, like any woman, needs the protection of a godly father, and then the protection of a godly husband. Abraham didn't look after Sarah. Twice he willingly gave her away to another man, and both times it is right after hearing directly and physically from God that through Sarah the promised Seed or Descendant would be born.

What should a godly woman do? How should she live? Overall, Sarah did trust God, even though she had moments of doubt and unbelief. In fact, the Bible describes Sarah as a model for all women to follow. And as a result, God was faithful to protect her, despite her husband's deliberate neglect of her welfare. Ladies, even if your earthly father and/or your earthly husband don't protect and respect you as they ought to, you have a heavenly Father and Husband who does. So be like Sarah, who despite being abandoned twice by her prophet husband, trusted that God would look after her.

Hebrews 11:11-12 NKJV

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

1 Peter 3:1-6 NLT

In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over <sup>2</sup> by observing your pure and reverent lives.

<sup>3</sup> Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewellery, or beautiful clothes. <sup>4</sup> You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. <sup>5</sup> This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. <sup>6</sup> *For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. **You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.***

We rightfully wonder just what role Sarah played in helping or winning over Abraham to follow and trust God? I suspect that godly Sarah was a major influence on Abraham, that she greatly encouraged her husband to draw close to God. I think that it's true that, "behind every great man, there is an even greater woman".

A warning: In the prevailing culture of Sarah's time, she didn't have a choice of who she married, but she trusted that God would look after her regardless. However, in today's world, most women do have a choice. So if a woman chooses a worldly man who doesn't protect and respect her, then she has chosen a life of heartache and pain—it is her own doing—she can't blame God. So the warning is this: Ladies, choose your husband carefully. You only get one chance. Trust God to bring you the right one. Measure him by biblical standards or attributes of maturity (will he be a good father to your children, a good and faithful husband, a good and faithful provider, gentle, humble, kind, no addictions etc), and not worldly standards of "handsomeness, wealth, coolness, sporting prowess, intellect, etc. If a guy (or girl if you are a guy), wants sex before marriage, steer clear of that individual who is infatuated (driven by selfish lust and not selfless love). The foundation of love is respect and honour—stealing a woman's (or man's) virginity is the epitome of disrespect and dishonour.

Abraham is humbled—the prophet of God is rebuked by a worldly king.

vs 3-10 **But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”**

**4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 5 Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”**

**6 And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”**

**8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?”**

What Abraham did to his wife Sarah and them was so revolting that even these worldly people were disgusted by what he did—**“What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.”**

Abraham’s pathetic excuse—no repentance as yet

vs 11-13 **And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. 12 But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’** This is Abraham justifying himself. “An excuse is a lie, wrapped in a reason”. “An excuse is a skin of a reason stuffed with a lie”. Consider the wisdom from the different human sources pulled together by *askai.glarity.app* in relation to the above excuse phrases.

“The phrase “An excuse is a lie, wrapped in a reason” suggests that excuses often disguise the truth. When someone makes an excuse, they typically provide a justification for their actions or inactions, but at the core, these excuses may not reflect the real reasons behind their behavior. Here are some insights into this concept:

1. **\*\*Understanding Excuses\*\***: An excuse serves as a justification for not fulfilling a responsibility or commitment. It often sounds reasonable on the surface but may mask deeper truths about a person's motivations or failures.
2. **\*\*The Nature of Lies\*\***: The phrase implies that excuses are inherently dishonest. They may not be outright lies, but they often misrepresent reality. For example, saying “I was too busy” may hide the fact that one simply chose not to prioritise a task.
3. **\*\*Psychological Perspective\*\***: From a psychological standpoint, people make excuses to protect their self-image or avoid accountability. This can create a cycle of avoidance where individuals fail to confront their shortcomings or take responsibility for their actions [1].

4. **\*\*Impact on Personal Growth\*\***: Recognising that excuses often hide the truth can be liberating. By acknowledging the underlying reasons for our behavior, we can work towards personal growth and improvement. This involves being honest with ourselves and others about our limitations and failures [2].

5. **\*\*Quotes Reflecting the Idea\*\***: The idea is echoed in various quotes, such as "An excuse is a skin of a reason stuffed with a lie," which reinforces the notion that excuses are thinly veiled attempts to justify not taking action [4].

In summary, the phrase highlights the importance of honesty and accountability. By peeling back the layers of excuses, individuals can confront the truth of their situations, leading to better decision-making and personal responsibility."

### What does genuine repentance look like?

So now we know what excuses or unrepentance looks like, what does true repentance look and sound like? Abraham could have said something like, *"I'm sorry. I was wrong to lie to you and abandon my wife. I am a terrible example of what a godly man should be. Please forgive me for the pain and suffering my lack of faith in God has caused you and your family. Is there anything I can do to help make it up to you?"*

This would be Abraham taking responsibility for his sin, and making himself accountable for the pain and distress his sinful decisions had caused.

### Abimelech rebukes Abraham and Sarah

vs 14-18 **Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him.** <sup>15</sup> **And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you."** <sup>16</sup> **Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.**

<sup>17</sup> **So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children;** <sup>18</sup> **for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

The Holy Spirit makes it clear that God didn't accept Abraham's "skin of a reason stuffed with a lie". Twice Sarah is described as Abraham's wife, not his sister: "**Sarah his wife**" (v 14), and "**Sarah, Abraham's wife**" (v 18).

Notice in verse 16 that after listening to Abraham's excuse, Abimelech calls out both Abraham and Sarah on their lie when he says to Sarah, "**Behold, I have given your brother...**" This would have stung.

An ethical dilemma: There is an interesting dilemma that God answers here. Since Sarah is called to submit to her husband, does it mean that if Abraham asks her to lie that she must lie? The answer is a clear no! Sarah was a willing participant in this wicked scheme, and she got caught out for her lies—"Thus she was rebuked" (v 16). Ephesians 5:22 makes it clear that a woman is not required to sin if her husband asks her to, "*Wives, be subject (be submissive and adapt yourselves) to your own husbands as [a service] to the Lord*" (AMP). The woman's first and overriding obligation is to the Lord, to do what is honouring for Him. Lying is not right or honourable. If the husband asks his wife to lie, the wife must choose to honour the Lord and speak the truth. Sarah should have trusted God to protect her and Abraham, instead of going along with her wayward husband's lying scheme.

### **3. After 25 years the promise is fulfilled—Isaac is born**

**Genesis 21:1-7 NKJV**

**And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. <sup>2</sup> For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. <sup>4</sup> Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup> She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”**

Isaac’s name means “laughter”. His name would forever remind Abraham and Sarah of the joy of believing God’s promises.

v 7 **She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age”**: Sarah states the obvious—God just did a wonderful miracle, pure and simple. Sarah now understands God’s good and perfect will for her and Abraham. She also learns (the hard way), that God’s gifts and promises are always good for us, and don’t cause nasty side effects or problems (like the situation with Hagar and Ishmael, see Genesis 16).

Oh the wonderful mercy of God. If Isaac was up up to Abraham and Sarah, he would never have been born. God used two very human, weak, and flawed people, and used this trial to grow their faith. When we read about Abraham and Sarah in the New Testament, we see them as being heroes of the faith, and yes, that is how they finished. But that is not how they started. Their whole life was a long hard road of learning to trust God. The Bible says that God forgets our sin, that he casts it away as far as the east is from the west. When a believer stands before God, their sins will not be remembered. This is why Abraham and Sarah’s many failings are never mentioned in the retelling of the account of their lives in the New Testament.

**Psalms 103:12 NLT**

He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

**Isaiah 43:25 NKJV**

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

**Isaiah 43:25 NLT**

“I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for My own sake and will never think of them again.

However, if the believer has failed to progress or grow in their faith, if they have not chosen to learn to trust God, if they have loved the world and the passing pleasures of sin more than God (see Hebrews 11:25), then they will have very little reward, and will experience shame because of their wasted life. Abraham and Sarah are a part of the cloud of witnesses who are great examples of how to respond to God’s promises and grow through the trials, of people who repented when they sinned and resumed fellowship with God. Abraham and Sarah were in a constant struggle of leaning to trust God more and more—it was a hard life—but a rewarding life. They have no regrets now that they are in the presence of God. Next week we will contrast the lives of Abraham and Sarah with that of Lot—a believer who did not repent and spent his whole life tormented as he chased worldly things. We’ll learn more about Lot, Abraham’s nephew, next week.