

Abraham Said of His Wife: She is My Sister

20: 1-2

DIG: Why did Abraham move from the Oaks of Mamre? Why do you think Avraham persists in this lie about not being married to Sarah? Who is he concerned about? Why? Why should he have known better? What was different now?

REFLECT: Have you ever made the same mistake over and over again? How hard is it for you to break bad habits? Do you have a bad habit that seems to have been with you forever? Do you live in fear? What solution could you choose?

Now Avraham moved on from the Oaks of Mamre, where he had live for twenty years, and the hill country of Judah, into the region of the Negev desert and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he temporarily stayed in Gerar, the capital city at that time of the land of the Philistines near the Egyptian border, and modern day Tell Abu Hureirah (20:1). This was a prosperous city, as revealed by archaeological excavations there, and it may be that Abraham has some kind of business dealings in mind. The city controlled a lucrative caravan route and by this time Abraham was a wealthy and powerful chieftain.³³¹ Or maybe the view of the plain and the constant reminder of the ruin was too much to bear.

And while staying in Gerar, Abraham said of his wife Sarah: She is my sister. Abraham was afraid that if Abimelech knew Sarah was his wife, he would kill him in order to marry her. This was not a question of being caught off guard. This was the reoccurrence of an old sin. Long ago in Egypt he had followed the same wicked course (12:13). However, this was twenty-five years later. Since then he had built an altar to the LORD, conquered Chedorlaomer and the four kings of the east, had been blessed by Melchizedek the priest of the Most High God, had refused the offer of the King of Sodom to be enriched by him, and received great revelations and promises from God.³³²

This is the last test where Abram totally failed. First, he stayed in Haran when he should have gone to the Promised Land (11:31b). Secondly, he left the land of Canaan and went to Egypt. Thirdly, Abram listened to his wife instead of waiting on the LORD, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael and untold problems (16:1-16). And fourthly, here, his lapse of faith continued as he refused to trust ADONAI for his and his wife's safekeeping when he lied again to Abimelech (20:1-18).

Hundreds of times in Scripture we are told not to be **afraid**. But how can we help it? If someone we love is in danger, if awful possibilities constantly present themselves, what are we to do? The king **David** gives the answer: **When I am afraid, I will trust in You (Psalm 56:3)**. **He** brings the two conflicting powers, emotion and will, into a single verse. **He's** a realist. **He** does not deny the feeling, but **he** doesn't let that govern **his** life either, or drain the energy **God** gives for **his** work. **He** feels one thing and does another. **He** applies the antidote. I think the best way to do that is simply to offer up to **the Lord** each **fear** as it comes, and pray for grace to go on peacefully doing the work **He** has given us to do.³³³

At that time, **Abimelech King of Gerar**, ruled the land of the Philistines, who were the descendents of Ham (10:14). The word **Abimelech** was not a proper name, it is merely a title of the **King of Gerar**. Just like the term pharaoh was not a proper name, but the title of the king of **Egypt**. When **Abraham** entered **the land**, **he** knew little about the people who live there, but it didn't take to long for **him** to realize they were an ungodly lot. The old fears **he** had experienced in **Egypt** suddenly returned. Once again, they agreed that **Sarah** would be pass off as **his sister**, rather than **his wife**, for the same reason as before (see **Dv - Now There Was a Famine in the Land and Abram Went Down to Egypt to Live**).

Sarah was ninety years old and **it is surprising that in her old age she was still so attractive that kings desired her**. Or possibly **Abimelech** viewed **her** as of political value, since **Abraham** was a powerful and rich chieftain. **The king** already had a harem and, as was the custom in those days, kings had a right to take any woman they might choose into their harems, whether for sexual or political motives.³³⁴ But for whatever reason, **he sent for Sarah and took her (20:2)**. By repeating this sin, **Avraham**, once again, endangered the birth of Isaac. But **God** was not caught off guard. **He** never is.