

Faith and Sin

Abraham—part 12

Genesis 20

August 30, 2026

DAY 1: A study of how sin works

Genesis 20:1 Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar; ² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

³ But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.”

⁴ Now Abimelek had not gone near her; so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?

⁵ Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister,’ and didn’t she also say, ‘He is my brother’? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.”

⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.”

⁸ Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, “What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.” ¹⁰ And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

¹¹ Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ ¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.” ’ ”

¹⁴ Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelek said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

¹⁶ To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, ¹⁸ for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

1. We will dive into this passage this week. For now, what strikes you most from this passage?

DAY 2: Pictures of God: Abimelek's dream

1. The setting: Abraham and Sarah move south toward Egypt and near to the land of King Abimelek.
2. Remember God's covenant with Abraham that he and Sarah will give birth to a child of the covenant. What would happen if she became pregnant by someone else? What if she were killed?
3. As he had done years before, Abraham panics, fearing for Sarah's life and his life, so he told Sarah to lie about being his sister.

4. How could God protect them in a foreign land where there was "no fear of God?"

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5. God springs into action!

- a. How did God speak to the king?

- b. What was God's FIRST message to the king? (verse 3).

- c. What is the king's response to God? (verses 4-5).

- d. What strikes you about God's response to the pagan king? (verse 6).

- e. How did God protect Sarah from becoming pregnant? (verse 6).

- f. What strikes you about God's urgent message to the king? (verse 7).

6. God is on top of this potential catastrophe! What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Abimelek's decisions and God's restraining power

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1. Abimelek claims to have taken the high road. He appeals to:
 - a. His innocence
 - b. Blaming Abraham,
 - c. Blaming Sarah,
 - d. A clear conscience, and
 - e. His clean hands.
2. Why do you think the pagan king had such cogent discernment about the dangerous situation?
3. When someone claims the moral high ground and a clear conscience, there are several factors at work:
 - a. On the **human** side, we naturally assume the best about ourselves (Psalm 36:2) and will act in a way that is moral when it coincides with what we think is in our own best interests.
 - b. On **God's** side, we see His unseen restraint on human sin. With Abimelek, it involved (1) God's omniscience of the complete situation, (2) God's action to intervene (the dream), and (3) God's stern warning of the severity of human wrongdoing.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.
4. What strikes you about God's intervention and Abimelek's awareness and decision to abstain from immoral behavior?
5. As you think about your temptations to do what is wrong, what strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Abraham and on-going sin

1. Abraham did the same thing thirty years prior. He had traveled to the area just east of the Suez Canal, east of Egypt. He was afraid that Pharaoh would swoop up Sarah and “life would be over as we know it.” He reacted out of fear, refusing to trust God, and told Sarah to lie—“Abraham is my brother.”

2. Why did Abraham would make the same mistake/sin, telling Sarah to lie? The sin that prompted this mess was his refusal to trust God with a situation that was “out of his control.”

3. Theologians have a term for sins that we regularly fight--**besetting sins**.

*Hebrews 12:1 Therefore since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every sin that **besets** us and **so easily entangles** us...*

4. The Greek word “entangles” (ἐμπρίστανος) is illustrated by someone *thwarting* a racer in every direction.

5. A besetting sin is one that feels like a habit, a moral weakness to which we seem powerless to defeat. When faced with the same temptation, we all too often fall into the same sin.

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Genesis 20:11 Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.¹³ And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.” ’ ”

6. There are five striking observations about Abraham’s besetting sin.

a. This besetting sin was begun at an early age. “...when God had me wander from my father’s household...” This occurred at the very beginning of Abraham’s story! (v. 13).

b. He drew the worst possible and wrong conclusions about the king (v. 11).

c. He lied.

d. He dishonored God and Sarah to save himself (the central problem of “first me, then you”).

e. He refused to believe God, instead seeking to “control” the situation.

7. As we get older as Christians, we should not be surprised by our own “besetting sins,” temptations and sins that “...beset us and so easily entangle us...”

8. Here is how the writer instructs us as to besetting sins...

Hebrews 12:1 ... And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: The realities of spiritual growth

1. When I was a young Christian I could see growth in my life, and I assumed that continued spiritual growth was not going to be that difficult, and that the trajectory was a straight line on the increase. Over the years I have realized that I was too naïve about spiritual growth and especially about the raw material of my human nature that needed changing.
2. I assumed that spiritual growth was largely cognitive. I have been very committed to the bible since my conversion at age twenty and have benefitted enormously from the bible's wisdom and truth. But there have been times when I have been absolutely befuddled as to why I keep doing the same sins, and saying things like, "How could I do that again. *I know better.*" I assumed I'd be sinning less and less until pretty much done.
3. Human nature's chief problem is not cognitive. It is willful. We are naturally stubborn, willful, fierce, determined to be our own king. I had no idea how stubborn self will was, how committed to self I was, and how fierce the fight would be to relinquish my will and ways to God.
4. This episode in the latter years of Abraham's life should cause us to ponder about our own human nature. The bible tells us that our human nature is a mixed bag. On one hand we are made in God's image, the crown of creation, but on the other hand there is something twisted in our nature. The bible's umbrella term for this is "sinner."
5. Theologians call this depravity. That doesn't mean that we do the worst we can do. It means that we will always "miss the mark," be and act in the way of self-interest first and fall short of God's standards and desires for us. We will center our lives around self rather than the center pole of God. We will find ourselves seeking self-praise and if that doesn't work we will exhibit self-pity—anything that will get us the attention and affirmation we most crave, without having to depend on God.
6. If you wonder, "Why do I **keep doing** the thing I've always done," welcome to the understanding the depth of our fallen nature. "Why do I keep responding **the same stupid way?**" Welcome to the deeper understanding of the depth of our fallen nature.
7. This is why we need Christ. We cannot unpeel our human nature, no matter how hard we try. God plays the long game with us. Our transformation is a long, slow process. There are times when it seems we are making fast progress. There are times when it seems we are making slow progress. There are times when we wondering if we are making any progress. Growing as a Christian is the proverbial two steps forward, one step back, three steps forward, two steps back, and sometimes we wonder if we even know how to take steps.
8. Our self is ever trying to promote self, protect self, inflate self, feed self, polish it up, make self look good.
9. When we are growing up, we unconsciously learn about life, people, and ourselves. We "learn" what brings us satisfaction and we learn what brings us pain. We learn what makes us feel alive and what feels like death. We unconsciously learn what is "life" and "death" events to our soul. And those lessons become deeply rooted in our soul. Those lessons become our

unattended to fountainhead of life—how we think, how we relate, how we act. And we become deeply committed to those ideas, ways of relating, and actions. What happens as we get older? Our natural response is to double down on those lessons, while beginning to realize that those lessons aren't working like they use to. They bring pain to me and pain to others. They inhibit me and adversely affect my relationships.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?