

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior we experienced instant maturity? Imagine bypassing the messiness of babyhood and the temper tantrums of childhood and transforming into spiritual adults right after our new birth! In an instant, we'd be courteous and kind, willing to share, and honest. We'd have no struggles, no pain, no battles with the flesh, no arguments with others, and no repeating sins from the past. Our spiritual walk would be one direction only—upward. Wouldn't that be great?

Spiritual maturity, however, is an up-and-down learning process. Look at Abraham's spiritual-growth chart, for example. He soared in faith when he moved his family from Ur to the Promised Land. But then, not long after, he stumbled when he lied to Pharaoh to save his own skin. But then he shot up again when he displayed great-heartedness by giving Lot first choice of the land.

In this study, we'll see Abraham repeat the success-failure cycle once more. On the heels of his gracious meal with the Lord and two angels (Genesis 18:1–16) and his compassionate prayer for the people of Sodom (18:17–33), Abraham repeated a past failure when he lied to Abimelech just like he lied to Pharaoh. Abraham's actions demonstrate the tendency in all of us to struggle with the same sins. Thankfully, God responds to our repeated failure with forgiveness, again and again . . . and again!

Quotable

*God has a plan
that's far better
than one we could
ever devise, and we
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— Charles R. Swindoll



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Abraham's lie to Abimelech is so similar to his lie to Pharaoh that it's like Abraham is singing the same off-key song, second verse. **Read Genesis 20:1–18**, and fill in the following chart that compares the two accounts. The first blank has been done for you.

	Genesis 12:10–20	Genesis 20:1–18
Setting	Abraham and Sarah moved to Egypt (12:10).	Abraham and Sarah moved south to the Negev and to Gerar (20:1).
Situation	They lived as foreigners (12:10).	
Deception	Abraham told Sarah to say that she is his sister (12:11–13).	
Motive	Abraham was afraid the Egyptians would kill him (12:12).	
Results	Pharaoh took Sarah into his palace (12:15).	
Judgment	God sent plagues upon Pharaoh (12:17).	
Response	Pharaoh rebuked Abraham and sent him and Sarah away (12:18–20).	



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Searching the Scriptures Tool—Finding Gerar

The place names in the account—“the Negev,” “Kadesh and Shur,” and “Gerar” (Genesis 20:1)—were familiar to the original readers. The Negev was an arid region in the southern part of Palestine. In the days of Moses, the Philistines had settled in the region to the west of the Negev and along the coast. When Moses wrote Genesis, his readers would have known the area as “the land of the Philistines” (21:32–33) and Gerar as a regional hub.

Find Gerar on this online Bible atlas: <http://bibleatlas.org/full/gerar.htm>. Notice its proximity to Beersheba, which is a prominent location in Abraham’s next encounter with Abimelech (21:22–34). Gerar was in foreign territory, and Abimelech was a pagan king. The lessons to the Hebrews were these: just as God protected the patriarchal family in a foreign land, so He will protect the Hebrews as they enter Canaan; and just as God blessed Abimelech through Abraham, He will show grace to those who show grace to the Hebrews.



Observation: Abraham’s Disobedience

When Abraham moved from the security of the hill country to the lowlands of Gerar, Abraham’s old enemy, fear, whispered in his ear. According to Genesis 20:11, what fearful thoughts entered Abraham’s mind?

This fear prompted an *act of disobedience*. Then came *the consequences of Abraham’s sin*, followed by *God’s response of grace*.

The Act of Disobedience—Genesis 20:1–2

What did Abraham say to Abimelech, and what did Abimelech do? Why do you think Abraham allowed Abimelech to take Sarah?



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How did Abraham's lie and passivity put in jeopardy the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 12:1–3)?

The Consequences of Disobedience—Genesis 20:3–13

God came to Abimelech in a dream and accused him of what evil deed (Genesis 20:3)?

What was Abimelech's defense (20:4–5)?

What was God's remedy (20:6–7)?

What do you observe in Abimelech's dialogue with Abraham about confrontation and confession (20:8–13)?



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Notice the mind games that led Abraham to deal the pagan king a stacked deck of deception:

- He made a false assumption, “Surely there is no fear of God in this place” (Genesis 20:11 NASB).
- He let fear undermine his faith, “They will kill me because of my wife” (20:11 NASB).
- He rationalized his deception, “Besides, she actually is my sister” (20:12 NASB).
- He shifted the blame, “When God caused me to wander from my father’s house” (20:13 NASB).
- He selfishly used his wife to protect himself, “Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother’” (20:13 NASB).

What do you learn from Abraham’s example about the subtle way our flesh influences our mind to sin?

God’s Response of Grace—Genesis 20:14–18

God used Abraham’s disgrace to demonstrate His bountiful grace. And pagan Abimelech became the instrument in God’s hand!

What did God do for Abraham through Abimelech (Genesis 20:14–15)?

What did Abimelech say to Sarah, the matriarch of the covenant, to vindicate her (20:16)?



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How did Abraham respond, and how is his prayer a model for how God's people should relate with the nations (Genesis 20:17)?



Interpretation: Finding the Meaning

When we study Scripture, we should always ask, “What did this passage mean to the original readers?” Let's first take a closer look at the meaning of the link between Abraham's lie to Pharaoh and his lie to Abimelech.

Pharaoh taking Sarah into his harem jeopardized God's promise (Genesis 12:10–20), and it occurred right *after* God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. The crisis of Abimelech taking Sarah into his harem occurred right *before* the fulfillment of the promise with the birth of Isaac (21:1–8). What principle did the original Hebrew audience learn about God from these two accounts and their placement in the narrative? What principle do you learn?

As a prophet living among the nations (20:7), Abraham was called to pray for the salvation of pagan Abimelech. Abraham's intercession demonstrated how “all the families of the earth will be blessed” through him and his seed (12:3). What principle from Abraham's example did the original Hebrew readers learn about the role of God's people among the nations? What principle do you learn?



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Finally, what meaning can we glean from Abraham's recurring problem of lying? Other Bible heroes repeated their failures. Moses, who killed the Egyptian early in his life and struck the rock later, had a recurring problem with anger. The wandering Hebrews, like leaky faucets, couldn't shut the flow of grumbling. Samson's lust got him into trouble again and again, and Peter often struggled with speaking before thinking.

What principle did Abraham's weakness teach the original Hebrew readers about weaknesses and recurring sins? What does it teach us?



Application: How to “Sing the Lord’s Song”

Just like Abraham and many other Bible characters, we tend to sing the same song of sin as if it's the only tune we know. How can we get this song out of our heads? By replacing it with the Lord's song. Here are three singing lessons to get you started.

Never presume on your weaknesses by going near temptation; instead, stay away. In what area are you weak? If the weakness is alcohol, stay away from the bottle; if lust, put blocks on your Internet devices; if gossip, speak only positively of those around you. How can you stay away from the temptation that exploits your weakness?

Never rely on your own crutches; instead, stay accountable. Abraham kept dealing from the same deck of deception, and Sarah played along. Find someone who will confront you when the old ways kick in. Who can you ask to help?



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Never lean on your own understanding; instead, let God work. How can you stand by and let God work out His plan in your situation, rather than take matters into your own hands?

God truly does have a plan that's far better than one we could ever devise. Let's stop leaning on our own way of thinking, and watch Him work!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I have no one but You. I come to You, the Fount of Life, to drink deep the refreshing waters of fellowship with You. I ask You to stop me short of leaning on my own way of thinking and my tired old strategies of self-protection. Grow me. Use others to help me. And build me to be a person of authenticity, honesty, and integrity. Amen.



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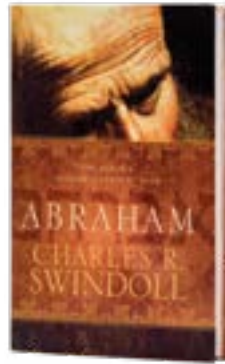
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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