



Overcoming Fear with Faith

(Genesis 20:1-18)

"Fear and faith can't live together very long in the same heart. Either fear will conquer faith and we'll quit, or faith will conquer fear and we'll triumph." – Warren Wiersbe

"Shortly after the destruction of Sodom and the Dead Sea cities, Abraham pulled up stakes and began the wanderings described in verse 1, first traveling south into the Negev and then spending some time farther south in the line between the oasis of Kadesh and Shur that formed the Egyptian defense wall in the eastern Nile Delta. After some time Abraham left the Kadesh-Shur grazing area to visit the royal city of Gerar back north on the fringes of the promised land."¹

1. Abraham's Cowardice (20:1-2) *"She is my sister"*

- Because of the pressure of an unknown, pagan land, Abraham must have forgotten about how he sinned in this same way when he went to Egypt (25 years ago).
- **Application: Some sins seem to entangle some believers more easily** (see **Hebrews 12:1**). "We each have our unique susceptibilities. Sins that may not appeal to others maintain a deadly lure for us and promote a tragic [habit]. Abraham's clinging sin when pressured was **to trust himself rather than God.**"²
- **Illustration: The Principle of the Seesaw** - "So long as our view of God is up, our view of ourselves will be down. God will be sovereign, wise, and holy. We will see ourselves as weak, foolish, and sinful. But if our view of God goes down, so that he becomes less than sovereign in our thinking, then our view of ourselves will go up and we will begin to imagine that we are generally quite able to take care of ourselves. This is what Abraham imagined. **Thinking that God could not take care of him, he assumed that he would have to take care of himself,** and this got him into the foolish predicament of this episode."³
- Abraham had three excuses: 1) There is no fear of God here (**v.11**). 2) Sarah really is her sister; that is, his half-sister. 3) We've been doing this for thirty years (**v.13**).

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 141, as quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 285–286.

² Hughes, 286.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 652.

- Proverbs 29:25 - The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.
- Psalm 56:11 - In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
- “A bad man’s example has little influence over good men. But the bad example of a good man, eminent in station and established in reputation, has an enormous power for evil.”⁴

2. Sarah’s **Compromise** (20:5) *“she, even she herself said...”*

- 1 Corinthians 10:12 - Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
- **Application - Believers may still sin in this life.** “Notice the elements included in this sin: a) The fear of man; b) innate selfishness; c) deliberate untruth; d) distrust of God through fear of circumstances. And what degradation it was to be rebuked by a man of the world!”⁵

3. Abimelech’s **Consequences** (20:3) *“Abimelech, you are a dead man...”*

- Even though it was through his ignorance and innocence, God intervened with severe consequences which caused Abimelech to change course. Through Abraham’s intercessory prayers, Abimelech is blessed and healed by God.
- *“You wouldn’t destroy a righteous nation **also**”* is pointing to the Philistines’ righteousness (*really self-righteousness*) compared to Sodom and Gomorrah’s wickedness.
- Abimelech gives gifts to extend his apology for misunderstanding Sarah’s marital status. He calls Abraham *“your brother”* to sarcastically point to the lie to her. *“Rebuked”* (v.16) is lit. *“vindicated”*.
- Abraham loses moral credibility in front of Abimelech. It is humiliating to think he fell into this sin again, and now a pagan Philistine king has to lecture a man of God about morality!

4. God’s **Control** (20:6) *“I did not let you touch her.”*

- Abraham and Sarah’s sin would not prevent God’s promise from being fulfilled.
- 2 Timothy 2:12–13 - *If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*
- **Application: When we are faithless, God remains faithful.** Bob Russell writes, “There is a difference between disowning God and being faithless to Him. To disown is to renounce, reject, disclaim. To be faithless is to be fickle, inconsistent, or erratic. When we are faithless, we make a temporary, usually impulsive, choice to do wrong. Faithlessness is not deliberate defiance, but an occasional stumbling.”⁶

⁴ James Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals* (Kregel, 1982), 141, as quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Be Obedient* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 90.

⁵ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1946), 180-181.

⁶ Bob Russell, *Promises, Promises: Genesis Chapters 12-22* (Louisville, KY: Bob Russell Ministries, 2007), 25.