



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 4

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Message Title: Faith and Fear Again pt. 2

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"And Abraham said of Sarah, his wife, "She is my sister". So Abimelech king of Gerrar sent and took Sarah."

Did I just read what I thought I read? Did he really say that? If you're using the Yogi Berra Study Bible, there's a footnote that says, 'Deja vu all over again!' We've been here, haven't we? Genesis Chapter 12 he went to Egypt, he did the same thing. But that was 25 years ago in Abraham's life. Think of all he had learned and all he had experienced in these significant steps of faith he had taken. What is he doing? What is he doing? He had just been told personally by God at the dinner table, Sarah's going to have the promised seed one year from now and he turns right around and gives Sarah up to Abimelech!

Think about these great moments of faith that he has experienced. I mean, Abraham on a moment's notice, he took on four enemy kings and he wiped them all out. He had stood on the bank and watched God's wrath poured out upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He'd seen this unimaginable display of God's power and suddenly he's afraid of one king and he fails. He fails miserably.

You know, I've noticed something over the years in my own life and just as I talk with people, that fear isn't based on logic and reason. Fear is an emotional response that reflects a core belief deep down in our hearts.

Fear is revealing some pocket in our heart that says, 'In this area I just don't trust God'. And that's part of this journey of faith. We need to accept that and we need to grow.

Verse three, "But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." Now Abimelech had not come near her. And he said, "Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even though blameless? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this. Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours. "

"God isn't exactly subtle with Abimelech. We would say, God got in Abimelech's face and He said, Abimelech, you're a dead man. That would get your attention. Abimelech responds and says, God, I didn't know what was going on. I mean, they said this was his sister. I did this with integrity in my heart. And God says, you know, I know that's true. I know that's true and I'm going to give you a chance to make it right. And if you make it right, then everything's going to be okay.

But I think what flows out of this text is the realization that Abraham and Sarah had nothing to fear. Abimelech was no match for God. Abimelech was nothing. God could have, easily have handled him. Abraham and Sarah were as safe as they could have been. They had every reason to have faith instead of fear.

Have you ever found yourself afraid of something and then as time passes, you look back and you think, what? What was I thinking? Remember when you're a kid and in the middle of the night, the wind's blowing and a branch is rubbing against the house. And you're sure somebody's coming to get you, or there's a shadow moving in the bedroom and you're sure somebody's coming to attack you. And then, pretty soon the light comes on and you realize, it's just a shadow or it's just a stick. Sometimes that's the way our fears are.

You know, spiritually you've been there and so have I. We find ourselves all fearful and anxious over something that is that ridiculous, because when you compare it to the God who sat at Abraham's dining room table and said, nothing's too difficult for me, Abimelech was no threat at all. And Abraham should have known that. He knew better and it becomes very obvious in this text that Abimelech is nothing in the face of God.

It is interesting when you get to verse seven though, that even though God has said Abimelech, I know that you did this in integrity and I'm going to give you a chance to make it right, but the whole process works its way through Abraham. In other words, God could have just directly dealt with Abimelech, but he said, no, you're going to have to give his wife back, and then he's a prophet and he'll pray to Me and when he prays to Me, then I'm going to take care of you. Now, doesn't that all seem a little bit backwards? I mean Abimelech is the one trying to act with integrity and Abraham is the deceiver, yet God almost turns it all upside down and says, no, it's going to have to come through my prophet Abraham, if you're going to be okay.

If all you knew was the story of chapter 20 and the names were changed to protect the guilty, who would you say was the righteous and who would you say was the unrighteous? It's backwards, isn't it? Doesn't Abimelech come forth really as the person of integrity and Abraham is the deceiver? Yeah, what you have in this text is God clearly saying, even though my man failed to trust me, I want you to know Abimelech, that he's my man and I'm committed to him in a covenant relationship and I'm going to work through him in order to deal with you. It's God's way of saying, even though Abraham has failed miserably, he's still my man and I'm committed to him.

You see, failure is not final, because God's favor is not dependent upon our performance, but upon His faithfulness. You have to know that, or you will never be a person of faith.

The story goes on, in verse eight, *"So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?"*

This is the second time that Abraham has received a chewing out from a pagan king, and both times he had it coming. Abimelech let him have it. As a matter of fact, he gathered other people together in this public hearing to set the record straight and then he let Abraham have it. As a matter of fact, if you look in verse 10, when it says, *"And Abimelech said"*, that's interesting because there was no interruption in the lecture, so there was no need to repeat that Abimelech was saying this, other than it's a Hebrew technique to say he was getting the chewing out of a lifetime. It's to remind us of the intensity that in a sense, Abimelech was in his face saying, what were you thinking? Why did you do this?

Abraham responds in verse 11 and it's pretty flimsy. *"Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; and it came about when God caused me to wander from my father's house that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother.""*

One of the things that's worth noting in this passage is Abraham is worried that Abimelech is going to want his 90-year-old wife. What else is interesting is Abimelech did. Now there's different theories on this. Some people think maybe God kind of rejuvenated Sarah's youth because she was about to have a child. We don't really know, but it is worth noting. She was 90 years old and Abimelech took her to be his own.

Abraham's reasoning is because I was afraid you didn't fear God and so I was afraid that you would kill me and take my wife. There's irony in this because it seems in the story that Abimelech fears God more than Abraham. As a matter of fact, when God gets in anybody's face, they'll respect Him.

Now what was really happening here is that Abraham's fear of Abimelech was greater than his faith in God. But really, regardless of where Abimelech was at, he was still no match for God.

In our language today, we call this peer pressure. We often talk about peer pressure as it relates to teenagers, but let's face it, it affects us from the youngest age all the way up to the grave. It's a fact of life, that we deal with pressure from people around us and what they'll think of us and how they'll respond to us and how they'll treat us. And sometimes our fear of that is greater than our faith. So, we compromise. So, we cave in. So, we go with the flow. Every time we compromise or give in because of our fear of the people around us, it's because our fear is greater than our faith. And that's exactly what happened to Abraham.

Verse 14, *"Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please." And to Sarah, he said, 'Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you and before all men that you are cleared.'"*

Abimelech has this public hearing. And not only does he kind of set the record straight, but then he bends over backwards to give Abraham and Sarah everything they could possibly need, and really telling everybody else, you know, leave these people alone, because he doesn't want to mess with Abraham's God again.

"And Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife."

It's interesting that Abraham prayed the same prayer, that he had been praying for his wife Sarah for 25 years. Only this time it was prayed for Abimelech and the women of his household. And immediately

that prayer was answered. God's way of saying, Abraham, I'm in charge here. And it should have been a reminder to Abraham that He will fulfill his promise. But again, it's interesting that God could have done this himself. God could have just said, okay, I'm taking the judgment off of Abimelech's family, everything's clear. But He didn't. The writer is very careful to say it came from Abraham to God to Abimelech.

Once again, it's God's way of saying, this is my man. I'm in a covenant relationship with him. I'm committed to him, and even though he's a big failure in this passage, he's still my guy.

See, God has this unimaginable commitment to those who dwell in covenant relationship with Him. God didn't have that commitment with Abimelech. Abimelech was trying to set the record straight, but God's commitment to Abraham was much different, because they were in a covenant relationship. And even though Abraham had failed miserably, God didn't hesitate to say, this is my guy. This is my man. We're in a covenant relationship together.

Did Abraham learn his lesson? Yes, he did. There would never again be another time where Abraham would fail like this, because of his faith. Did it happen overnight? No. It took 25 years to work out those areas of his heart where he still didn't trust God. Failure is not final, because God's favor does not depend upon our performance, but upon His faithfulness.

Those, who believe that Jesus died on the cross in payment for their sin, enter into this covenant relationship with God. And he's got an unimaginable commitment to you as His child. He's promised that He who has begun a good work will be faithful to complete it in Christ Jesus. Are Christians perfect? No, sometimes we fail because we don't believe. We fail because we don't trust. But that failure is not final.

I mentioned Peter at the beginning of my message. There's no question Peter's greatest failure came on the Thursday of Passion Week, when he stood around a campfire and three times he denied that he even knew Jesus as Savior. And then he went out and he wept bitterly. John Chapter 20 tells us that Peter celebrated the resurrected Christ. He knew that He had rose from the dead, but in chapter 21 he goes back to fishing, because Peter was absolutely convinced that he had failed and God could not use failures. Jesus could not possibly use him, he had disqualified himself. So he's back to fishing. And Jesus has to show up on the water and say to Peter, Peter, do you love me? Yes Lord, I love you. Then put down the fishing pole. We've got a kingdom to build. So Jesus picked him up and He brushed off the dirt and He said, let's get back on this journey of faith.

You have to know that failure is not final, or you will never be a person of faith.

Arnie: Bryan, thank you for encouraging us, because even though we're made new in Christ, we still fail.

Bryan: Yeah, we absolutely do. We all do. And it's frustrating and it's disappointing. But you know, the fact that we feel that is the evidence of the Holy Spirit within us. I want to be passionate for righteousness. I want to do the right thing; I want to obey. And that's why failure hurts. That's why failure disappoints, because that's not really who we want to be in Christ.

Cara: So, as I'm listening to your teaching, I'm thinking, how could Abraham experience all he experienced with God and then fail so miserably with what seemed like a pretty small test? This is a test he had already been through...

Bryan: Yeah, I think the intent of the writer is to kind of shock us with this story. And it's a reminder that Abraham was a real person, wasn't a superhero, and they lived real lives and these were real circumstances and there was the potential for these things to be life and death. So, you know, the Bible tells a story such as it is and reminds us that they're real people. The flip side of that is Abraham and Sarah were remarkable people of faith. They were real people, but they got to a point of believing and trusting God for most of their lives that was really quite remarkable.

Cara: Still seems odd though, that Abraham and Sarah know that the Promise Seed is coming and yet almost forfeited that promise by Sarah becoming part of Abimelech's harem.

Bryan: Yeah, the whole story is shocking and you have to wonder what was he thinking? And maybe he's thinking God's going to step in and rescue him. The text certainly doesn't say that, but I would say it's almost as confusing as the things we do, because the reality is we have way more of the story, way more promises. You know, the promise has been fulfilled. We have Christ living in us, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and we still do things that we look back on and wonder what were we thinking? So there's a reminder fear is not logical. It's not reasonable. It's easy to get caught up in all of that. And you can't just always reason your way through it. Fear is an emotion and sometimes it makes us do things we wish we hadn't done.

Cara: That's a good way to look at it. I mean, there's nothing we haven't seen already in the Bible, out of human nature, and yet we still do the same stupid stuff.

Bryan: Yeah.

Arnie: So it seems like Abraham was scared to death. Would you say that that holds true with us? Most of us? That we're just driven by fear?

Bryan: I think fear is certainly a big part of the story in Genesis 20 and I think it's a big part of lots of people's lives. But I also think it's an emotion and the emotion flows out of doubt. Doubt is really the problem. It all comes down to do I believe God tells the truth or not? And if I struggle with that, it may come out in fear, it may come out in anger, it may come out in disobedience, it may come out in self-sufficiency or self-righteousness. All those are ways we doubt. And fear is just one of the emotions that produces.

Cara: So we have the Holy Spirit in us all the time as believers. But how's that different from Abraham's experience with God?

Bryan: So maybe oddly enough, that's not a real easy question to answer. I think the Holy Spirit was involved much more in the Old Testament than often Christians think. But it was different. But it's also different, Abraham had God speak to him directly. I mean, God took on human form and had dinner with him. So there's ways in which Abraham's story was really different than ours. But then again, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. You know, Jesus, the night before he was arrested, told his disciples He's going to go away and it will be better, because the Holy Spirit will come and dwell within them forever. So Jesus said it's better, [Um-hm.] but certainly Abraham had experiences we don't have. But we also have a lot that Abraham didn't have. So it's just different. And certainly God has given us everything we need to live out the Christian life as He's called us to.

Cara: Well as you brought it up before too, we have the story and these guys didn't ...

Bryan: Yeah, they were looking forward. [Right.] And, we now know what's happened. So we do have so much more.

Arnie: At the end of this experience with Abimelech, God still fiercely defends and protects Abraham and Sarah. That's amazing. What can we take away from this?

Bryan: Yeah, so I think we take away that failure's never final, that we've all blown it, but God loves his children. And as His children, He doesn't condemn us. Romans says there's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. He just wants us back on the path of life. He disciplines us. He does what's necessary, but He loves us and possesses us and celebrates us. And even in our failures, just like a parent, God loves us and wants to see us back on our feet. And we need to keep traveling down the path, because failure never needs to be the end of the story.