GENESIS 20

Abraham's Deception

1 Then Abraham journeyed from there toward the south country. He dwelled between Kadesh and Shur. When he was living[i] in the city of Gerar, **2** He said about Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. **3** But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Look out! You are as good as dead.[ii] For the woman which you have taken is a man's wife."

4 But Abimelech had not come near her. So he said, "Adonai.[iii] Will You kill innocent[iv] people? **5** Didn't he tell me,

'She is my sister?'

"And she, even she herself, said,

'He is my brother.'

"I have done this covenant act[v] with an honest heart. I am completely innocent."

6 And Elohim said to him in a dream, "Yes! I know that you did this covenant act[vi] with an honest heart. I also kept you from sinning[vii] against Me. So I did not let you touch her. **7** Now therefore, give his wife[viii] back to him, for he is a prophet. He will pray for you and you will live. But if you don't give her back, know that you will surely die — you and all who are yours."

8 Therefore, Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants. Then he told them all these things. The servants were very[ix] afraid.

9 Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done things to me that you should not have done." **10** And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What made[x] you do this thing?"

11 So Abraham said, "I thought,

'Surely there is no fear[xi] of Elohim in this place. They will kill me in order to take my wife.'

12 "But she is really my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother. She became my wife. **13** And it came to pass, when Elohim caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her,

'This is the kindness[xii] which you will show me. Everywhere we go, say,

"He is my brother." ' "

14 Then Abimelech took sheep, and[xiii] oxen, and male servants, and female servants, and gave them to Abraham. He also gave Sarah, his wife, back to him. **15** And Abimelech said, "Look! My land is before you. Live wherever it pleases you."

16 And he said to Sarah, "Look! I have given your brother[xiv] 1,000 pieces of silver. It is a public vindication for you.[xv] Now everyone with you, and everyone else will know you are innocent."[xvi]

17 So Abraham prayed to Elohim. Then Elohim healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his female servants. Then they were able to have children. **18** For Yahveh had prevented all the women in Abimelech's house from having children because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.[xvii]

[i] The Hebrew גּוּר (*goor*) means "to sojourn" or "to dwell temporarily" as a non-native. It reflects the condition of living as a dependent or vulnerable outsider, often without legal rights or permanent settlement. It is closely related to the noun גֵּר (*geyr*), meaning "sojourner" or "resident alien."

[ii] The Hebrew הִנְּךָ מֵת ("Look! You are dead") is an idiom. It is a judicial-danger formula meaning that a person stands under a death sentence because of his actions. It does not describe literal death, immediate execution, or a guaranteed future death. It declares legal liability for a capital offense. The force of the idiom is that the person's conduct has placed him in a condition worthy of death under divine or judicial authority.

[iii] The Hebrew is ("Adonai"). It means Lord or master.

[iv] The Hebrew צַדִּיק (*tsahd-deek*) means righteous. Synonyms include upright, just, lawful, right, moral, and decent. Biblical righteousness is a person who is wearing the righteousness of Jesus. First, this righteousness is relational; it depends on being in Christ. Second, this righteousness is forensic; it fulfills the demands of God's covenant. Third, this righteousness is ethical; it reflects faithfulness to a relationship.

[v] The Hebrew זֹאת is a Zayin-**Aleph**-**Tav**. Its basic meaning is to cut, either as a blessing or a judgment. This translation routinely renders this 3-letter word in terms of covenant. See the article "The **Aleph**-**Tav**." Here it refers to his violation of God's covenant protection of Abraham.

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[vii] The Hebrew חָטָא (*chaw-tawh*) means to miss. Synonyms include sin, miss the mark, repent, lead astray, purge, incur guilt, and forfeit.

[viii] The Hebrew אִשָּׁת is an **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav**. The **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav** is the first (**Aleph**) love (*Shin*=flames) of the marriage (**Tav** = covenant). This is why Strong's defines the word as woman or wife. The deeper meaning is that Sarai was the mother of God's covenant nation of Israel. God uses and blesses these women.

[ix] The Hebrew מְאֹד (*m^{e}-od*) means vehemently. Synonyms include very, greatly, exceedingly, fervently, passionately, violently, intensely, much, mightily, and vigorously.

[x] The Hebrew מָה רָאִיתָ ("What did you see?") is an idiom. The verb רָאָה ("to see") often carries the extended sense of perceiving, concluding, or recognizing something that motivates an action. In narrative Hebrew, the idiom does not ask about visual sight but about the underlying reason or perceived circumstance that prompted a decision. It functions as a question: "What caused you to do this?" or "What led you to act this way."

[xi] The Hebrew יִרְאָה often means fear. But its meaning depends heavily on context. When referring to Yahveh, it conveys a profound reverence and awe toward God — one that shapes behavior and moral courage. It highlights a continuous, conscious lifestyle of honoring God's holiness and justice.

[xii] The Hebrew חֶסֶד (*cheh-sehd*) means steadfast love or covenant mercy. It is all the aspects of Elohim's love based on Elohim's covenant faithfulness. Synonyms include beauty, favor, loving kindness, mercy, pity, goodness, faithfulness, and love.

[xiii] The literary technique of Polysyndeton uses multiple "and"s (or other conjunctions) in a series. It slows the reader and gives emphasis to each item.

[xiv] Note the sarcasm here. Abimelech called him "your brother," not "your husband."

[xv] The Hebrew phrase הִנֵּה הוּא־לָךְ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם is an idiom built from הִנֵּה ("look"), הוּא ("it"), and כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם ("a covering of eyes"). In Hebrew usage, כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם does not mean a literal eye-covering but a legal or social idiom for public vindication — something that removes suspicion and clears one's reputation before others. In this case, when Abraham failed in his responsibilities, the LORD Jesus stepped in and kept things right.

[xvi] The Hebrew וְאֵת כֹּל וְנֹכָחַת ("and she was all reproved") means to appoint, correct, decide, or judge rightly. It often appears in legal or judicial contexts. We can see the devil's fingerprints here. Abraham was wrong to let Abimelech take her. This jeopardized the developing line of King Jesus. Sarah was guiltless.

[xvii] The Hebrew אִשָּׁת is an **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav**. The **Aleph**-Shin-**Tav** is the first (**Aleph**) love (*Shin*=flames) of the marriage (**Tav** = covenant). This is why Strong's defines the word as woman or wife. The deeper meaning is that Sarai was the mother of God's covenant nation of Israel. God uses and blesses these women.