

## She Is My Sister, He Is My Brother

Wilson L. Thompson, Ph.D.

Christians can certainly confess with Daniel that confusion reigns in the Church (Daniel 9:5-10). Sadly, we commonly view Abraham's practice of introducing Sarah as his sister, while technically true, as "at least a white lie," actually a sin against God. Abraham "said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister [therefore] Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah" (Genesis 20:2). But this injected *therefore* - that assumes Abraham's *partial-truth* cover story is in fact a *white lie* that backfires - does not fit other facts in Genesis. Abraham commands a militia 318 strong that early on rescues Lot (Genesis 14:14-16). King Abimelech, a kidnapper, is in fact "but a dead man," along with his entire house, if Sarah is not immediately returned (Genesis 20:7). "Therefore Abimelech rose early . . . and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears and the men were sore afraid" (Genesis 20:8). Abimelech does not delay. He knows he is in mortal danger of imminent attack from Abraham's "Minutemen."

Now hold on! Doesn't Abimelech accurately blame Abraham for his half-truth deception? How can we hold this heathen king responsible for his abduction of Sarah? Clearly, Abraham has misled him. Doesn't God acknowledge the justness of Abimelech's complaint against Abraham: "Said he not unto me, She is my sister?... in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this" (Genesis 20:5)? *No way!* Sinners from Adam on deny guilt often by projecting their own guilt onto others. Adam says, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:12). Adam actually blames God! "The Devil made me do it!" Etc. Abraham's prayers finally end God's curse of barrenness in Abimelech's house (Genesis 20:7,17).

But doesn't Abraham put Sarah at risk in a dubious scheme? Isn't Abraham, in effect hiding behind Sarah's skirts? No. Samuel uses a *partial-truth* cover story to fulfill a mission fraught with danger. God sends Samuel, under scrutiny of Saul's spies, to anoint David, Jesse's son, in place of rebellious King Saul. Samuel replies, "How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me" (I Samuel 16:2). The Bible does not impugn Samuel's faith or manly courage for this assessment of the obvious risk of his mission. Rather, God provides Samuel with an impeccable, *partial-truth* cover story. "Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD" (I Samuel 16:2). Is it Scriptural to assume that Abimelech has more right to the "whole truth" than murderous King Saul?

So, why, oh why, do we give Abimelech any benefit of the doubt while discounting in our minds the risk assessment of Father Abraham? "Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake" (Genesis 20:11). (Even today Christians are subject to unprovoked murderous attack in Islamic lands.) Are we so naive as to believe that Abraham can prevent Sarah's abduction if he is merely candid about his sister Sarah in the first place? What assurance do we have? How can we be sure that full disclosure regarding Sarah to Abimelech, who is a kidnapper at best (Genesis 20:9), does not trigger a surprise attack to massacre Abraham and his servant-warriors? Anyone interested in buying the Brooklyn Bridge?

In the Bible, we find that the servant-saints of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are a minority in Canaan and vulnerable to genocidal attack from envious neighbors. Isaac "had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him [and] all the wells which [Abraham's] servants had digged ... the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth" (Genesis 26:14-15). When the Philistines ceased striving with Isaac's herdsmen over a newly dug well, Father Isaac "called the name of [the well] Rehoboth; ... For now the LORD hath made room for us" (Genesis 26:22). David notes when Abraham's house (servants) "were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in [Canaan] ... He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:12-15).

God clearly does not absolve Abimelech of guilt. "Thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife" (Genesis 20:3). Like murder, kidnapping is treason against Abraham's family and merits death. Ignorance is no excuse! Abimelech's household is plagued because of his forcible abduction of Sarah (Genesis 20:17-18). God keeps Abimelech from compounding his sin against God "therefore suffered I thee not to touch her" (Genesis 20:6). He mercifully, as with King David, grants Abimelech exemption from the death penalty if he returns Sarah to Abraham without delay.

The Lord has already blunted the assault of Abimelech's soldiers against Abraham with faulty military intelligence. He moves hundreds of Abraham's circumcised servants and their wives to keep quiet about Abraham's "state secret" regarding his wife- sister Sarah. So they prevent a massacre of Abraham's defenders should Abimelech's men be mobilized to capture Abraham's *wife* rather than merely abducting his *sister*. When all is said and done, Abraham remains God's prophet who "prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants ... For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife" (Genesis 20:17-18).

Isaiah urges believers "that seek the LORD ... [to] look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you" (Isaiah 51:1-2). God confirms Covenant with Isaac, because Abraham "obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). And, we in fact lack an explicit "Thus saith the Lord" questioning Abraham's honesty, such as that which dooms Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:1-12). So, it is high time we drop any baseless notion that blackens Abraham's *partial-truth* watchword concerning *Sister* Sarah. As Abraham's children we are to "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:7).

Let us here and now henceforth resolve to give Abraham and Sarah their due honor as our Father and Mother in the Faith. We surely can and certainly should trust their better judgment regarding their envious Canaanite neighbors. Amen!