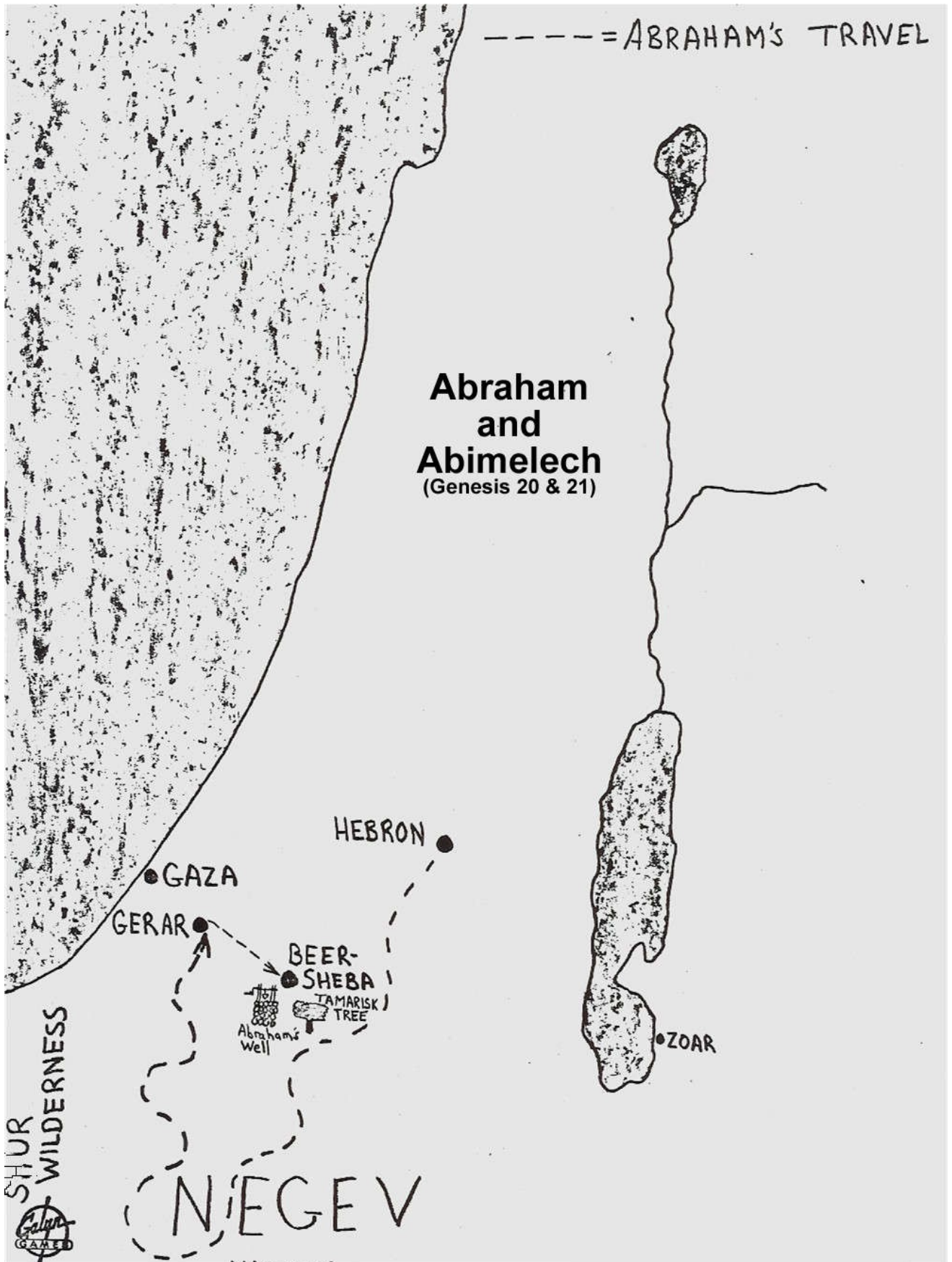


FEAR, FAILURE, AND FAITH!
GENESIS CH20:1-18



ILLUSTRATION

In preparing for the birth of a child, what 5 things are prioritised?

1. Create a birth plan!
2. Think about a doula!
3. Enrol in parenting classes!
4. Prepare the nursery!
5. Gather essential baby gear!

You don't:

1. Move unexpectedly! (v1)
2. Lie about your wife being your wife! (v2)
3. Let her be taken by a pagan king! (v2)
4. Blame God! (v13)
5. Make your wife complicit in your lie! (v13)

GOD SPEAKS + ABIMELECH RESPONDS! V1-7

Back in chapter **Genesis Ch17:21 + Ch18:14**, God tells Abraham that Sarah will have a child of her own, and that this will happen within a year! ***So, why go travelling v1 – Kadesh, Shur and Gerar?*** Surely, it is a season of preparing for the arrival of a son and the fulfilment of the promise! Abraham has up until now been living in Canaan and near Hebron for nearly 25 years! Why sojourn?

Along with, trying to work out, why move, we also need to work out, why lie? Abraham, once again in the presence of a pagan ruler (this time a king – v2) lies about his relationship to Sarah, just saying that she is his sister! Hasn't this happened before? **In Ch12:10-13**, Abraham lies to Pharaoh about his relationship to Sarah, and here he does the same thing!

It is worth noting that **“Faith and Fear”** alternate frequently in Abraham's life, like it can be frequent for many Christians today. Whereas, initially after Abraham's original act of faith in moving to Canaan in **Genesis Ch12:5**, he then suddenly fears for his life in **Genesis Ch12:10-13**, and so lies! It happens again, now, after interceding for the people of Sodom in **Genesis Ch18:22-33** (6 times), he once again faces a pagan ruler, a king this time, compared to a Pharaoh in **Genesis Ch12:17** and once again he faces fear and once again he lies!

It is not uncommon for the greatest of God's servants, when under pressure, to repeat the same sinful mistake, time and time again! You see salvation occurs in a second, but sanctification is forever this side of eternity!

All is not lost though, because God once again intervenes, but this time through Abimelech's vivid dream. God tells Abimelech:

- V3 - You are a dead man!
- V3 - The woman you have taken, is another man's wife!

Somewhat strangely, Abimelech is able to respond and interact with God in his dream and says:

- V4 - Will you kill an innocent people? (Link with v7)
- V5 - Both Abraham and Sarah told him lies!
- V5 - Abimelech highlights that his actions were integral!

God then responds to Abimelech:

- V6 - God acknowledges Abimelech's integrity!
- V6 + V7- But also reveals that it is God who has kept Abimelech's ***integrity***, by not allowing him to sin!
- V7 - And God instructs Abimelech as to what is needed to be done!
- V7 - First use of "prophet" in the Bible!
- V7 - And this prophet, Abraham, will pray for Abimelech! (link v17)

ABIMELECH SPEAKS + ABRAHAM RESPONDS! V8-13

Abimelech in a certain way is an innocent man with regards to the deception at least, but he does have a wife and female slaves (v17+18), so why take Sarah?

Abraham makes it clear when questioned by Abimelech that he was afraid because he v11, ***"thought there was no fear of God in this place and that he would be killed because of his wife."*** ***Sound familiar Genesis Ch12:12-13!*** But is Abraham right about what he thought? Mention the leaflets and the "New Estate!"

Is Gerar a godless place, is Abimelech a godless man and godless ruler? Abimelech:

- v4 He calls out "LORD" in his dream, the personal name for God!

- v5 He obeys the Lord!
- v8 He rose early after the dream for the Lord!
- v8 He told all concerned about the Lord!
- v9 He called Abraham and questioned him because of the Lord!
- v9 He challenged Abraham saying he had brought a great sin to him, taking sin seriously before the Lord!
- V14 He then blesses Abraham because of the Lord!
- v14 He returns Sarah safely and undoes the damage of her reputation because of the fear of the Lord!

Which man is acting with the “fear in God” most acutely at work in his thoughts and actions?

This is a great question to consider, especially between Abraham and Abimelech, but also for us. Do we think and act with the fear of the Lord at the heart of our decisions?

1. For the unbeliever, the fear of God is the fear of the judgment of God and eternal death, which is eternal separation from God (***Luke Ch12:5; Hebrews Ch10:31***).
2. For the believer, the fear of God is something much different, the believer’s fear is reverence of God. ***Hebrews Ch12:28-29*** is a good description of this: “Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”
3. ***This reverence and awe are exactly what the fear of God means for Christians. This is the motivating factor for us to surrender to the Creator of the Universe.***

Proverbs 1:7 declares, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Until we understand who God is and develop a reverential fear of Him, we cannot have true wisdom. True wisdom comes only from understanding who God is and that He is holy, just, and righteous.

Deuteronomy Ch10:12, 20-21 says, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.”

The fear of God is the basis for our walking in His ways, serving Him, and, yes, loving Him.

Some redefine the fear of God for believers to “respecting” Him. While respect is definitely included in the concept of fearing God, there is more to it than that. A biblical fear of God, for the believer, includes understanding how much God hates sin and fearing His judgment on sin—even in the life of a believer. ***Hebrews Ch12:5-11*** describes God’s discipline of the believer. While it is done in love (***Hebrews Ch12:6***), it is still a fearful thing. When we were children, our fear of discipline from our parents no doubt prevented some evil actions on our part. The same should be true in our relationship with God. We should fear His discipline, and therefore seek to live our lives in a way that pleases Him.

Believers are not to be scared of God. We have no reason to be scared of Him. We have His promise that nothing can separate us from His love (***Romans Ch8:38-39***). We have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us (***Hebrews Ch13:5***). Fearing God means having a reverence for Him that greatly impacts the way we live. The fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshipping Him in awe.

ABIMELECH ACTS, ABRAHAM PRAYS + GOD HEALS! V14-18

Abraham expects to find **godlessness in Gerar**, but in fact it's his own lack of spirituality that is revealed by the actions of Abimelech!

Abimelech the king and his officials fear God and act with integrity and nobility, when giving the gifts and the land!

Abimelech shows his fear in God by:

1. Giving sheep, oxen, male servants, and female servants! (v14)
2. Giving Abraham permission to live anywhere in the land, no longer seen as an alien/asylum seeker/refugee! (v15)
3. Giving to Abraham a thousand pieces of silver! (v16 – as a sign of her innocence, equivalent in those days to the price given for 20 brides (50 shekels a bride)! Or a slave in ***Exodus Ch21:32*** is worth 30 shekels, so with a 1000 pieces of silver it would be equivalent to 33 slaves! ***This was a public display of her innocence!***
4. Sarah is vindicated!

But the account doesn't finish there! Despite Abraham's failure, he is still God's prophet (first time this word is used in the Bible), and as God's prophet, Abraham prays! In praying to God, God we are told heals Abimelech, his wife and the female slaves so that they could bear children. Is there some irony in this account?

1. Abraham fears that there is no fear of God so he fears for his safety and lies! When king Abimelech shows that there is fear in God and tells the truth!
2. Abraham prays for the king and his people who are then all healed and able to have children, while Abraham and Sarah are still waiting!

APPLICATION

1. There will be occasions when we fall into the trap of being fearful, and be prone to doing the same sinful things.
2. But there is always grace and God who cannot break His Word or His promises will intervene and be honoured, always working for the good of those who love and trust Him!
3. What needy situations are there in our community where we could develop a prophetic prayer ministry?
4. What could Abraham and Sarah have done differently?