

5 Political & Family Crises: The Consequences of Unbelief

[Genesis 20-21](#)

Have you ever gotten into trouble because you didn't trust God to take care of you? Did you take matters into your own hands and in the process cut some moral or ethical corners? If so, you have company. Even Abraham gave in to his fears and failed to tell the truth in a potentially dangerous situation. The Bible has no plaster saints. It doesn't cover over the sins of its heroes. So we can learn from their *failures* as well as their successes.

In the previous study we saw Abraham at his best as he showed concern for a sinful city. In this study we find him near his worst as he pursues a course of action with potentially disastrous consequences for everyone concerned

Read [Genesis 20](#).

Genesis 20:1-18 (NIV)

- ¹ Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar,
- ² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.
- ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."
- ⁴ Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?"
- ⁵ Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."
- ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her.
- ⁷ Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."
- ⁸ Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid.
- ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done."
- ¹⁰ And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"
- ¹¹ Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'
- ¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.
- ¹³ And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"
- ¹⁴ Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him.
- ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."
- ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."
- ¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again,

¹⁸ for the LORD had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

1. Describe Abraham's situation and how God deals with it ([Genesis 20:1-7](#)).

How does God's conversation with Abimelech show his concern for those who are outside his covenant relationship?

2. What do the questions Abimelech asks the next day reveal about his attitude toward Abraham ([Genesis 20:8-10](#))

3. How does the patriarch try to explain his way out of this difficulty ([Genesis 20:11-13](#))?

What potential consequences did Abraham's deception have for Sarah, for their promised son and for Abimelech's family?

4. From Abimelech's actions how would you describe his character ([Genesis 20:14-16](#))?

5. In what way is Abraham's stature restored in the finale of this story ([Genesis 20:17-18](#))?

6. Think of a difficult situation in which fear or unbelief led you to a course of action that didn't honor God. What were the consequences and lessons you learned?

Read [Genesis 21](#).

Genesis 21:1-34 (NIV)

¹ Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.

⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."

⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast.

⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking,

¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

¹³ I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set

them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes.

¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob.

¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do.

²³ Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

²⁴ Abraham said, "I swear it."

²⁵ Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.

²⁶ But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

²⁷ So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty.

²⁸ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock,

²⁹ and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by yourselves?"

³⁰ He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

³¹ So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

³² After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines.

³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.

³⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

7. The name *Isaac* means "he laughs." Describe Sarah's reaction and how she feels after waiting so long for this joyful event ([Genesis 21:1-7](#)).

How can Sarah and Abraham's experience encourage us to be more patient and faithful in waiting for unanswered prayer?

8. What problem does Abraham face in [Genesis 21:8-14](#), and how is it resolved?

9. How does God help and encourage Hagar in her hour of crisis ([Genesis 21:15-21](#))?

10. What does Abimelech's request show about his attitude toward Abraham ([Genesis 21:22-34](#))?

11. Review the ways in which God was gracious and faithful to the main characters in this story.

How can God's grace and faithfulness motivate you to trust him the next time you are tempted toward doubt and disobedience?

6 The Sacrifice of Isaac: Ultimate Faith and Obedience

[Genesis 22-23](#)

Suppose God asked you to give up someone or something at the very center of your life—a loved one, your home, profession or plans for the future. How would you respond? In this study we walk with Abraham through such a valley of testing. He comes to the climax of his career as he faces a soul-shattering event. Abraham's experience can teach us how God provides for those who honor him with such faith and obedience.

1. Read [Genesis 22](#). In God's command to Abraham what phrases emphasize the magnitude and painfulness of this sacrifice ([Genesis 22:1-2](#))?
2. Describe some of the thoughts and emotions you would have if you were Abraham.
3. What do the details of the narrative reveal about Abraham's response to this incredibly difficult situation ([Genesis 22:3-10](#))?
4. At the crucial moment how does God intervene ([Genesis 22:11-12](#))?
5. In [Genesis 22:12](#) the Lord says, "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Based on Abraham's example, what do you think it means to fear God?
6. How does God's provision for Abraham in [Genesis 22:13-14](#) fulfill the confidence he expressed earlier ([Genesis 22:5, 8](#))?
7. Have you ever faced a situation in which obedience to God required you to give up someone or something you loved? Explain.

How did the Lord provide for your needs?
8. In [Genesis 22:15-18](#) the Lord reiterates his promises to Abraham. Why is this an especially appropriate time to do this?
9. Read [Genesis 23](#). When Abraham decides to bury Sarah among the Hittites, how do they react to his first request ([Genesis 23:1-6](#))?
10. What steps does Abraham go through to observe the laws of the land ([Genesis 23:7-16](#))?
11. As a resident alien Abraham would have many rights, but not that of owning land. Why do you think he persists in his desire to own the burial plot?
12. At the time of Sarah's death, she and Abraham had not seen the fulfillment of most of God's promises. How was her burial a silent testimony to their future fulfillment ([Genesis 23:17-19](#))?
13. How can these two chapters encourage us to trust God when we still don't see the fulfillment of some important promises?

7- A Wife for Isaac: God's Guidance and Care

[Genesis 24:1-25:11](#)

How do you go about discovering God's will in a specific situation? When you think you understand his will, do you simply wait for it or do you work toward its fulfillment? Although the Bible gives no formulas or blue prints, it does illustrate certain principles we can apply. In this study Abraham continues to wind up his affairs by arranging for the sure succession of his line. Here we have the fascinating story of the way he went about securing the right wife for his son Isaac.

1. Read [Genesis 24:1-27](#). What main concerns are evident in Abraham's commands to his servant ([Genesis 24:1-9](#))?
2. As the servant arrives at Nahor he offers the first prayer for personal guidance recorded in the Bible. What does he specifically ask of God ([Genesis 24:12-14](#))?
3. Several characteristics of Rebekah are noted in [Genesis 24:15-25](#). Describe in your own words the kind of person she seems to be.
4. What does the servant's prayer in [Genesis 24:26-27](#) reveal about his own relationship with God?
5. Read [Genesis 24:28-67](#). How does the servant's account in [Genesis 24:33-49](#) reveal his excitement and awe at the Lord's guidance?
6. The servant had not asked for a vision or miraculous event but for guidance through clear signs in natural circumstances. When has God guided you in this way?
7. How does Rebekah's family react to these sudden, unexpected events ([Genesis 24:50-53](#))?
8. In what way is Rebekah involved in the decision to go with the servant ([Genesis 24:54-60](#))?
9. Describe the return of Rebekah with her servant and what her arrival must have meant to Isaac ([Genesis 24:61-67](#)).
10. Read [Genesis 25:1-11](#). What do we learn about Abraham's final years?
11. How would you sum up his life in one sentence?
12. What is the most important lesson you have learned from studying the life of Abraham?

8 Jacob and Esau: A Family Feud

[Genesis 25:12-27:40](#)

Controversy and quarreling among brothers, euphemistically called sibling rivalry, is prevalent in most families and is a part of growing up. It can be contained, however, if it is dealt with consistently and fairly. But when the parents show partiality and take sides, this struggle often becomes malignant and fatal to family unity.

This study opens with the joy of long-awaited birth. After twenty years, Isaac and Rebekah have not just one son but twins. As the boys grow up, parental partiality develops with tragic consequences for family relationships. Yet throughout these events God works out his sovereign purpose and remains merciful to this family in spite of their failures. Not only can we profit from their mistakes, but we can also be encouraged by God's love for us even when we fail.

1. Read [Genesis 25:12-34](#). According to [Genesis 25:12-18](#), how were God's promises to Hagar fulfilled (see [Genesis 16:7-16](#))?
2. What difficulties and tests of faith do Isaac and Rebekah encounter in connection with the birth of their sons ([Genesis 25:19-22](#))?
3. What do we learn about Esau and Jacob from before their birth until they grow up ([Genesis 25:23-28](#))?
4. What does the incident in [Genesis 25:29-34](#) reveal about the character of the two brothers?
5. [Genesis 25:34](#) states that Esau despised his birthright (his double portion of the inheritance and future role as head of the family). In what areas are you tempted to give up something spiritually valuable for the sake of something of little or no value?
6. Read [Genesis 26](#). How does Isaac follow his father's footsteps in his dealings with Abimelech ([Genesis 26:1-11](#))?
7. In what ways have you experienced the strength of your parents or been influenced by their weaknesses?

What can you do to improve the area of weakness?
8. What specific promises does the Lord make to Isaac in reaffirming his covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 26:2-6](#), [23-25](#))?
9. Read [Genesis 27:1-40](#). In [Genesis 25:28](#) we learned that "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob." How does this parental favoritism work itself out in the struggle recounted in [Genesis 27:1-17](#)?
10. How can you show equal love and care to family members with radically different personalities?
11. How does Jacob succeed in deceiving his father ([Genesis 27:18-29](#))?

What blessing does he receive?

12. Describe Esau's reaction and the blessing he obtains ([Genesis 27:30-40](#)).

13. As a result of this study, what one thing can you do within your own family or present living situation to reduce tension and encourage better relationships?

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