

# Genesis Ch20v1-18 - Living By Unbelief!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you.

So we're going to read Genesis chapter 20 together. Again, I encourage you, if you've missed any of the talks, you can follow back online.

They're recorded and put up each week. Please avail of that. It's for you, for your good. So Genesis chapter 20, starting at verse 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. And there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, She is my sister. Then Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her.

[ 1 : 18 ] 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.

Now Abimelech had not gone near her. So he said, Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, She is my sister.

And didn't she also say, He is my brother? Father, I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands. 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. 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 who belong to you will die. Early the next morning, Abimelech summoned all his officials.

[ 2 : 27 ] And when he told them all that had happened, They were very much afraid. 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 never be done. And Abimelech asked Abraham, What was your reason for doing this?

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. Besides, she really is my sister, The daughter of my father, Though not of my mother, And she became my wife.

And when God calls me to 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.

Then Abimelech bought sheep, Cattle, And male and female slaves, And gave them to Abraham. And he returned Sarah, his wife, to him. And Abimelech said, My land is before you.

[ 3 : 38 ] Live wherever you like. To Sarah he said, I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offence against you Before all who are with you.

You are completely vindicated. Then Abraham prayed to God, And God healed Abimelech, His wife and his female slaves, So that they could have children again.

For the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelech's household From conceiving, Because of Abraham's wife, Sarah. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father, would you please speak to us in such a way That we can engage with your word with our minds, That we understand it.

But would you deal with us, That we would engage with it in such a way That it changes our life, That we do business with you today, Father.

[ 5 : 00 ] That we would leave this building Changed and blessed Because of what you have done in us. We ask this from you Because without your work We are helpless to change anything in us.

We need your help. Be gracious to us. And it's in your name we pray. Amen. Groundhog Day, I'm sure some of you are familiar with the phrase, But it's something That has happened before And

that happens again.

It's a recurring of the same event. This was portrayed in the film With the same title, Groundhog Day. The lead character was a man called Phil, A weatherman who confidently announced That the threatening snow blizzard Was going to bypass their city.

Except for his predictions were all wrong. The blizzard struck And the city came to a standstill. And the whole film is all about Phil Who wakes up each morning And relives the same awful nightmare experience.

It's like he's been caught up In this recurring loop. Well it seems Abraham Is having his own Groundhog Day. Have a look with me at verse 1.

[ 6 : 34 ] Now Abraham moved on from there. He was in the region of Sodom. And he moves down to the Negev And lived between Kadesh and Shur.

So a new area for him to stay. For a while he stayed in Gerar. And there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, She is my sister.

Now why would Abraham be saying something like that? Well Abraham was afraid That if they discovered Sarah was his wife They might kill him.

So verse 2 He comes up with a plan. Tell them she is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar Sent for Sarah And took her.

Now you might be looking at that and go That sounds very familiar. And you'd be right. Have a look with me back to chapter 12 For a freshener.

[ 7 : 37 ] Back to chapter 12. Abraham has just received God's promises That he will be a great nation.

That he's going to have a family. And that all the nations of the world Will be blessed through him. But look what happens. Verse 11 As Abraham was about to enter Egypt He said to his wife Sarah I know what a beautiful woman you are.

When the Egyptians see you They will say This is his wife. Then they will kill me But will let you live. I know. Say you're my sister So that I will be treated well For your sake And my life will be spared Because of you.

Familiar? Let's go back to chapter 20. Abraham has already been there Done that And got the t-shirt. It was a classic case of unbelief.

God had repeated his promise to him Over and over and over again Specifically telling him That he would have a son Through Sarah. But it seems like he's forgotten All of those promises And once more chapter 20 He steps out in unbelief.

[ 9 : 02 ] It's Groundhog Day. But let's not slam Abraham. We have our own Groundhog Days All the time. We too live by unbelief.

The same recurring choices and decisions Not to believe God's promises Turn up again and again. Repeatedly we're reminded That with God We lack no good thing.

That he's given us Every spiritual blessing in Christ. That he's given us Everything we need For a godly life. God reassures us Time and time again My grace is sufficient for you.

But despite being promised All we need We still don't believe the promises Do we? We prefer to trust in other things And look to other people.

Every day is like that recurring Groundhog Day. But we don't have to live in a cycle of unbelief. We don't have to live in a pattern of Continued sin.

[ 10 : 12 ] It can change. There is another way. But before we get there Let's look at how unbelief Is so serious And so devastating.

First we want to see The serious effects Of living by unbelief. The serious effects Of living by unbelief. Unbelief is never An individual thing.

It's never just about My choice and my decision That affects only me. Like when you throw a stone Into a pool So our acts of unbelief Have this ripple effects That fly out to other people.

First it affects others. Look at verse 2. After all that Abraham had said Look at the end of verse 2. Abimelech, king of Gerar Sent for Sarah And took her.

He takes a woman Who was married To someone else. Now it might well have been Unintentional Verse 5. Did he not say to me She is my sister And didn't she also say He is my brother?

[ 11 : 26 ] I've done this With a clear conscience And clear hands. Well yes it was Unintentional But it was still wrong. The point is Abraham's life Of unbelief Has led to the sinful choice Of Abimelech.

You see none of us Can ever claim That my sin Is only personal And it affects Only me. This is my life And these are my decisions And they have no bearing On anybody else.

No that's not right. How we live And how we behave Has a serious effect On others. It has this Ripple effect. In fact it's More dangerous Than that.

Because we discover It's also against God. Look at verse 6. Then God said To Abimelech In the dream Yes I know You did this With a clear conscience And so I've kept you From sinning Against me.

That is why I did not let you Touch her. You see Abimelech's Decision to take A wife That wasn't his Was not just Against Abraham And against Sarah.

[ 12 : 45 ] It would ultimately be As we see there In verse 6 God says It would be Against me. Yes there is a Merciful intervention God kept him From taking Sarah To himself But to take Sarah As a wife Would be To sin against God.

You see Abraham And Sarah Belong to God As does every Human being. He made us He owns us So to harm Another person To go against Another person Is in reality To go against God.

He takes it Personally. So can you see The serious effects Of living by Unbelief. Abraham's decision Not to trust God and tell Lies about His wife Ends up With Abimelech Not only taking A wife that Doesn't belong To him But now he Finds himself Under God's Judgment.

But more than That It all leads To death. Verse 3 God came to Abimelech In a dream One night And said to Him You are as Good as Dead Because of The woman You've taken She's a Married woman.

You see That's what Happens when We go against What God Says. We come under God's judgment And we die. You see Sin has this Ripple effect.

[ 14 : 22 ] It's never Just about Me and My life And the Things that I do And say It's all Up to Me. It doesn't Affect Anybody Else. It does Affect Everybody Else.

And Abimelech's Sin is even Having a Wider effect In his Own family. Did you see That at the End of Verse 7? But if you Do not Return her You may Be sure That you And all Who belong To you Will die.

So can you Follow the Thread of What's Happening here? Each person May be Held Responsible For their Actions But it All started With the Unbelief Of Abraham.

He chose Not to Believe the Promises of God. And it Had a Serious Knock on Effect. Instead of Being the One who Brings Blessing To the Nations Because of His Behaviour He's now Bringing a Curse To the Nations.

Maybe you Haven't Thought about This before But it Is a Theme that Runs all The way Through Scripture. Go forward With me Please to Exodus.

[ 15 : 36 ] It's the Next book In the Bible After Genesis. Exodus Chapter 34. Exodus 34.

And here In this Chapter God Reveals Himself To Moses. He shows Moses What his Character Is like.

We'll pick it Up in Verse 6. Exodus 34. Verse 6. And he That's God Passed in Front of Moses Proclaiming The Lord The Lord The Compassionate And Gracious God Slow to Anger Abounding In Love And Faithfulness Maintaining Love To Thousands And Forgiving Wickedness Rebellion And Sin.

Now look What else It says. And Parents Listen Carefully. Yet He does Not Leave The Guilty Unpunished.

He Punishes The Children And Their Children For The Sin Of The Parents To The Third And Fourth Generation. You See My Behaviour As A Father My Sinful Behaviour Has An Effect As They Do What I Do And So It Goes On Down The Line Living By Unbelief Has A Terrible Ripple Effect That Reaches Far Beyond Our Own Life And If We Want To Get How Serious God Takes This Go With Me Please To Matthew Gospel Chapter 18 Matthew Gospel Chapter 18 First Book In The New Testament Jesus Here Has Been Teaching

[ 17 : 46 ] Little Children Small Ones Explaining That The Kingdom Of God Belongs To Them Too And That We Can Learn From Little Children And Then He Goes On To Say This Chapter 18 Verse 6 If Anyone Causes One Of These Little Ones That Is Those Who Believe In Me To Stumble

I That Their Let They Can't Come Like That illegitieness In hot has a serious effect on others. It can lead them to turn away from God and it can lead to our own judgment. Let's go back to Genesis 20.

So first, the serious effects of living by unbelief. Second, there's the devastating impact of living by unbelief.

You see, it not only affects others, it also, of course, has a deep and profound impact on us personally. So having been confronted by God, God now uses Abimelech to go and confront Abraham.

[ 19 : 56 ] Look at verse 10. And Abimelech asked Abraham, what was your reason for doing this? Why did you tell me so many lies?

Why did you act like this? Well, Abraham responds, and I'm not sure if it's a confession or if he's just simply restating the facts.

Either way, Abraham reveals the devastating impact of living by unbelief. It starts with not trusting God.

Verse 11. Abraham replied, I said to myself, here's the reason for why I did what I did. There is surely no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife.

Abraham assumed that in this new area he was living, his life would be in immediate danger. And in some ways, the threat was credible. That's what powerful kings like Abimelech could do.

[ 20 : 58 ] But remember, Abraham had a promise for situations like this. Go back to chapter 18 and verse 13. Let's remind ourselves of what God had promised Abraham.

Chapter 18, verse 13. Then the Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child now that I'm old?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son. You see, Abraham, do you remember what I told you?

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. That means threats from powerful kings are not a problem. I don't need you, Abraham, to come up with your schemes to save the day.

Abraham, I just want you to walk by faith and obey my promise. But he doesn't. In fact, it turns out that Abimelech seems to have more fear of God than Abraham has faith in God.

[ 22 : 08 ] He simply doesn't trust what God said and Abraham takes matters into his own hands. He puts his trust in self. Now, how many times do we believe our own thoughts over God's word?

unbelief is subtle and can show up in all kinds of ways. It starts with not trusting God and it moves very quickly to blaming God.

You see, when unbelief gets us into a pickle, well, it's not my fault, that's for sure. Look how Abraham continues, verse 13. And when God caused me to wander from my father's household, if God had never told me to leave my family home and to move to this new land, if God had just left me where I was, I was comfortable, everything was alright, if God, then none of this would have happened.

You see, living by unbelief is never our fault, is it? It's God who got me into the mess and now I have to try and find a way out of it, even if it means disobedience.

You see, we're all a little bit like Abraham. We're like his earlier great, great, I'm going to get confused now, but he's like Adam as well, in the Garden of Eden when God confronted him with his unbelief.

[ 23 : 50 ] Do you remember what Adam said? This is what he said to God, the woman you put here with me, she gave me some of the fruit from the tree and I ate it.

God, if you didn't put this woman here, then I wouldn't be in this mess. It's not my fault. How often do we think if God didn't let this happen, if he changed this circumstance, if he changed this event, then it would be fine.

You see, living by unbelief just leads to blaming God. In fact, it goes a step further and a step deeper. It leads to living as God.

Look at verse 13 again. And when God caused me to 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.

This was the text that Abraham had at his front door of his house. It kind of ruled their lives.

Everywhere they went, everywhere they travelled, this is how you can show your love to me.

[ 25 : 06 ] Remember, everywhere you go, say of me, he is my brother. He came up with his own rules. Ones that ensured he was kept safe.

Of course, he presented it all as a wonderful act of love, wasn't it? This is how you can show your love to me. Oh, Sarah, if you really loved me, you would see that this is a good plan for your life.

Never mind the harm it does to Sarah as long as Abraham is okay. You see, he is acting as if he is God, that he knows best and that he knows better. And that is what living by unbelief is all about. It is saying, I am God, this is my life, and I will do what I want for me. Can you see the devastating impact of living by unbelief?

My thoughts replace God's word. My circumstances are God's fault. My life, my way.

[ 26 : 15 ] Doesn't it all sound so familiar? Doesn't it sound like our groundhog days? God's fault. It's not good. But here is the point of the whole text.

We don't have to live like this. The cycle has been broken. We can live lives of faith and trust in God.

So third, look at the gracious response to living by unbelief. The gracious response. chapter 20 is certainly a tragic account.

Abraham, the man of faith, is really Abraham, the man of unbelief. His actions have messed up the life of Abimelech and all his family and it's messed up his life and put his own wife in danger.

And as readers of the text, as we read through it, we expect to read something like this. And God spoke to Abraham in a dream. That's it, Abraham. It's not going to work.

[ 27 : 21 ] I've given you every opportunity. I've given you chance after chance. I've reminded you of all my promises. It's not going to work. I'm going to have to look for someone I can trust.

But that's not how it ends, is it? Because God amazingly responds in grace and kindness. He doesn't get the stick out.

He doesn't start berating Abraham all around the place. God restores Abraham in all of his mess. And he does it in two ways.

First, Abraham is blessed by God. God has obviously been at work in Abimelech's life. Let's read about that in verse 7.

God spoke to Abimelech and said, 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 who belong to you will die.

[ 28 : 34 ] You see, it's a call to Abimelech to repent, to change the way you're going. So, returning Abraham's wife is repenting of what he had done.

The evidence of his repentance is now seen in how he treats Abraham, verse 14. Then Abimelech bought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves or workers and gave them to Abraham and he returned Sarah, his wife, to him.

And on top of all of that, Abimelech said, my land is before you, live wherever you like. Now, aren't you amazed at how Abraham, who caused all the mess, who lied and brought such misery to Abimelech, who put his own wife in danger, ends up being blessed.

We're reading and go, no, that's not right, you can't do that sort of thing, it's not fair. If anything, it should be the other way around.

But that's the extraordinary way in which God works. God doesn't treat us as our unbelief deserves. And God's grace doesn't even end there.

[ 30 : 00 ] Because look what happens next. He not only blesses Abraham, he now starts using Abraham. He uses a man of unbelief to bring blessing to Abimelech.

Look at verse 7 again. God said to Abimelech, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live.

Verse 17, then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female slaves, so that they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelech's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

Isn't it extraordinary? God uses a sinner like Abraham to pray for a sinner like Abimelech.

unbelieving Abraham gets down on his knees and prays for God's blessing, and Abimelech gets blessed. Isn't it amazing?

[ 31 : 16 ] And if God can use an unbelieving sinner like Abraham to bring blessing to another person, how much more will God bring his blessing through the faithful and obedient Son, Jesus Christ.

Not just to one person, but bring blessing to all nations. You see, it's not that God ignores the unbelief.

No, God knew there was unbelief, and God had to deal with it, so God sent his Son, Jesus, who was treated on the cross as an unbeliever for you and for me, and God punished our sin in Jesus so

that we could be forgiven.

We are blessed. We were reminded of that blessing, weren't we, at the beginning of our time this morning.

Let me read to you again Psalm 32. Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

[ 32 : 27 ] Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit is no deceit. You know right now if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus, not one of your sins are remembered by God.

Not one. As far as the east is from the west, so far as he removed every one of them, no longer to be remembered.

you are blessed. But more than that, it's blessing upon blessing. Ephesians 1. Blessed.

He has blessed us in the heavenly realms with what? Every spiritual blessing in Christ. Not just some here and there, but every spiritual blessing.

We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he has lavished upon us.

[ 33 : 35 ] You see, if you've turned to Jesus, all your moments of unbelief, all those groundhog days are no longer held against you.

you are free from guilt and shame. You are loved and treasured forever. You see, we can look at this text together and think, oh, but my life and the knock-on effects of the things I have said and the things that I have done and how it's affected my children and how it's affected this person and that person, how could any of that be forgiven?

forgiven. But this is the good news of the gospel. It is all forgiven. It is no longer held against you.

It's no longer held against me. It's all been forgiven. But not only that, he takes us as messed up, broken people and he blesses us and he says, now go and be a blessing to other people.

and perhaps the best way we can start to bring blessing is like Abraham, to start praying for our children and for our families and for our friends to get down on our knees, messed and broken as we are, but yet God using us to bring blessing to other people.

[ 35 : 11 ] You see, God is determined to bring blessing to the nations and God in his grace will use people like us, people who are weak and fragile in faith but are held up in the faithful hands of God, never holding our sin against us, but filling us with his spirit and sending us into the world and into our communities and into our families and saying, you can be a blessing.

We don't have to live in a cycle of unbelief. We simply believe in God's promise that we are set free and we are changed and we can live the life that he has called us to, never to be held back again.

Let's just take time to reflect. Let's just take time to reflect. Father God, we are amazed at your kindness in how you respond to us.

thank you for your grace afresh. Thank you that because of your son Jesus Christ, we are blessed.

We are made new. We can live a new way. Help us this day to not only hear the promises you have, but to believe them and to live by them.

[ 37 : 12 ] in the knowledge that all our sin is forgiven, never held against us, and that because we are now your children filled with your spirit, we can go and be a blessing to others.

No matter how we feel about ourselves, no matter what we have done, you can use us. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for this privilege and we pray that you will indeed bless our children and bless our families and bless our neighbours and would you, Father, please bring them to faith in Jesus too because you are good and you are kind.

thank you, Lord. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing together a song that will help us to celebrate the amazing grace and the amazing goodness of God to us.

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how he could love me. How marvellous, how wonderful.

I invite you to stand to sing if you're able. Thank you.