

## No Compromise Genesis 12:10-20



Most of you have probably seen the movie *Fireproof* starring Kirk Cameron. It is a powerful movie about the covenant of marriage, love and forgiveness.

[This scene at the end](#) is a tearjerker, to be sure, but there is a problem with this part. When he got married, Kirk Cameron made the following promise. “I made a commitment not to kiss any actress, ever. That’s reserved for my wife.”<sup>1</sup> But the problem is



that the woman in *Fireproof* is not his wife—this is (right). The problem is that on one hand, Kirk made a commitment to never kiss an actress, but on the other hand, he is also committed to making good movies. How does one reconcile these two commitments without compromise? The solution was to dress up his wife to look like his movie wife and use a silhouette so the viewer couldn’t tell the difference.

God will never ask us to compromise what he has revealed to be true. No matter what circumstances life throws at us, there is always a way of obedience open to us. Even though it may feel like we are forced to choose between two evils. There is always a way of righteousness. There is always a way of escape. Abram faced some very difficult choices and we can learn from his victories, as we did the last two weeks, but we can also learn from his failures.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup> When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.”

<sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

<sup>17</sup> But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. <sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” <sup>20</sup> And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

This story in chapter twelve is very similar to the one in chapter twenty, and both of these are similar to the story about Isaac in chapter 26. Here is a chart that compares and contrasts the three events.

	Gen 12:10-20	Gen 20:1-18	Gen 26:1-11
<b>CAUSE</b>	Famine in Canaan	Abraham's choice	Famine in Canaan
<b>PEOPLE</b>	Abram & Pharaoh	Abraham & Abimelech	Isaac & Abimelech
<b>LOCATION</b>	Egypt	Philistine	Philistine
<b>DECEPTION</b>	"she is my sister"	"she is my sister"	"she is my sister"
<b>REASON FOR DECEPTION</b>	Sarai was beautiful "so that I will be treated well...and my life will be spared because of you"	"There is surely no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife."	"because he was afraid" "The men ...might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."
<b>JUDGMENT</b>	"Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh..."	Abimelech's household was unable to conceive.	None mentioned
<b>REVELATION TO PAGAN</b>	None mentioned: possibly God spoke to Pharaoh	God spoke to Abimelech in a dream.	Abimelech saw Isaac caressing Rebekah.
<b>PAGAN RESPONSE</b>	"what have you done to me?" " <i>I took her</i> to be my wife."	"...you <i>have brought</i> such great guilt upon me and my kingdom."	"you <i>would have brought</i> guilt upon us"
<b>RESULT</b>	"Abraham acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels."	"Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham and...a thousand shekels of silver."	"Because the Lord blessed him...[Isaac] became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy."

Since these three stories contain very similar details, I will concentrate on the one in chapter twelve, but I will pull details from all three. The chief similarities in all three is that Abraham or Issac were living in a pagan land and both men had drop-dead gorgeous wives. This combination was like walking through the most crime-ridden part of a neighborhood carrying large bags of cash, while you announce to everyone within ear shot, "I am carrying large bags of cash. There is probably close to a million dollars in here!" You might as well throw the money in the air and knock yourself in the head, because you are as good as dead.

Abram's "problem" was his beautiful wife. Some guys might be thinking, "Boy, I'd like to have a "problem" like that!" (You'd better NOT be thinking that!) We all know that the Bible does not parade around physical beauty as something to be sought after. Proverbs 31 says, "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Inner beauty is far more important than outer beauty, but the Bible certainly does not condemn physical beauty and when it describes a woman as beautiful, it means what it says. Both Sarai and Rebekah were absolutely beautiful women. And don't forget that both women were nomads, which means they lived in tents surrounded by thousands of animals and looked more like Pigpen from Peanuts than a movie star—they were always walking around in a cloud of dust. Have you ever seen pictures of movie stars without make-up? A woman who you thought was beautiful becomes average or worse when caught without all of chemical enhancements known as make-up.

When Abram and Sarai walked into Egypt, do you think Sarai has just emerged from a bath? Do you think she was dressed in her finest clothes, wearing the best perfume with perfect hair and looking like a graduate of extreme makeover? Of course she wasn't, but all of Pharaoh's wives would have had access to all of these things—and more. Each of Pharaoh's wives would have had personal assistants, baths, oils, perfumes, fancy revealing clothing, hairbrushes and gold

jewelry laden with jewels. Despite what they had compared to what Sarai had, we read the following in verse fifteen. *And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh.* Sarai has a natural beauty that turned the heads of everyone in Egypt. And don't forget—she was sixty five years old at the time!

Abram's "problem" of a gorgeous wife was compounded by the severe famine in Canaan. As one commentator put it, "Here is the first threat to the realization of God's promises: a dead Abram, dead either through starvation or execution."<sup>2</sup> Do you recall the three basic parts of God's promise to Abram? He was promised a great name, a great people and a great land, but all three of these promises could not be fulfilled if Abram is dead. This is the tension that the reader is supposed to feel. *We* know how the story ends, but *Abram* did not know how it would end. Abram was afraid to die. He was afraid to die of starvation in Canaan and he was afraid of getting his head chopped off in Egypt. What Abram needed was a way of escape. And he saw the way out of trouble. It was as clear to him as an oasis in the desert—deception. He made Sarai promise to tell everyone that she was his sister.

This is what we would call the sissy way out of a problem and it all happened in a single verse. In verse nine he was the victor and by verse ten he was the victim. In verse eight he was engaged in worship and by verse eleven he was wallowing in self pity. His fundamental issue was that he feared man more than he feared God. Abraham, the man of faith, did not have enough faith to trust God to deliver him from the famine in Canaan or the foe in Egypt. Going to Egypt was not necessarily wrong. One could argue that God might well have planned to meet his needs for food in Egypt in the same way that God had planned to protect Jacob's family from starvation by allowing Joseph to rise to power in Egypt and thereby save his family.

Going to Egypt wasn't the problem, the issue was lying in order to save his skin. Do you know why we lie so often? We lie to one another because it works. As soon as a child tells his first lie and doesn't get caught, he or she thinks to himself, "Hey, that turned out pretty well. I'll have to remember this little trick." So the little child tucks away that lesson about lying in his toddler toolbox for the next time he needs it. Eventually the child will come to realize that lying doesn't always work. Sometimes you are going to get caught. Eventually, even the smartest child will leave incriminating evidence lying around. Maybe they get a spanking or a time out or privileges taken away. But after they serve time for the dirty deed, they turn into an expert of statistics. Even a three year old is smart enough to do a risk and reward ratio. They reason that if they get away with a lie more often than not, then it is well worth the risk.

Did Abram get away with this lie? Not only did he get away with it, but he got wealthier as a result. Look at verse sixteen. *And for her sake he (Pharaoh) dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.* Abram lied, saved his life and got rich. If someone makes a lot of money in an honest manner, we might get a little jealous, but if someone makes a lot of money through dishonest means, we get angry and disgusted. We know that the wicked do prosper at times. We hear the cry of Jeremiah when he said, *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?* (Jer. 12:1) It's bad enough when the Pharaohs and the Bernie Madoffs of the world prosper for doing evil, but it is even worse when noble Bible characters like Abraham prosper for their wickedness.

How could God have let him get away with this massive deception? Worse still is the fact that, like the toddler who learns to lie for his own benefit, Abram learned a lesson of deception that he carried with him for quite some time. Listen to what happened when he tried the same ruse with Abimelech in chapter twenty.

<sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

<sup>11</sup> 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.’ <sup>12</sup> Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> 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.”**’”

We have names for people like Abram, don’t we? We call them not just chronic liars but compulsive liars. They have been caught in a web of deceit for so long that lying has become a routine habit. If the lying wasn’t bad enough, Abram exposed his beautiful wife to great harm. Pharaoh gave Abram a tongue lashing in verse nineteen. *Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife?* Sarai was taken into Pharaoh’s harem and became many of his wives. The same thing happened in chapter twenty when Abimelech took Sarah as his wife. In that story we are explicitly told that “Abimelech had not gone near her,” (Ge 20:4) but we are not given the same assurance with Pharaoh. Did Pharaoh go near Sarai? Did he violate her purity? We are not told whether he did or didn’t, so we are left wondering. Personally, I don’t believe he did or else the discipline meted out would have been even more severe than it was, but nevertheless, you can see the danger that Sarai was put in by her husband. He wasn’t much of a husband, if you ask me.

The other question that haunts me is, “Why didn’t Sarai refuse?” We might be inclined to think that she was submissive because that was the culture of her day, but that is not what we know about her personality. Sarai hatches a plan to bear children through her maidservant, Hagar. Sarai was certainly no submissive wife in that story. And how did Abram and Sarai acquire Hagar in the first place? Hagar was Egyptian, so they most likely acquired her as part of Pharaoh’s dowry that he paid to Abram. Isn’t that ironic? Moreover, when Hagar did bear a son, Sarai became insanely jealous and forced Abraham to send her and Ishmael away. I think that Abram bears most of the guilt in this tragedy, but Sarai was no innocent bystander.

We do see some amazing things in this triad of deception. First, we see a wonderful example of common grace. In the story of Abraham and Abimelech, we read:

<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.” <sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup> Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and **it was I who kept you from sinning against me.** Therefore I did not let you touch her.

Verse six is a great comfort to us—*it was I who kept you from sinning*. In the early chapters of Genesis, we established the doctrine of total depravity—every part of our being is marred by sin and we cannot earn our own righteousness, however, total depravity does not mean that we are as bad as we could be. In this instance, it was God who kept a pagan king from sinning. If God, in his common grace available to all, can keep a pagan monarch from sinning, how much more can he help his dear children overcome sin?

Moreover, there is a common morality in all three stories. Both Pharaoh and Abimelech knew that taking another man's wife was wrong and deserved death. They practiced polygamy but never adultery. Whatever negative qualities they may have had, these pagan kings possessed a morality that surpassed that of Abram. The pagan kings were to be blessed through the promises given to Abram, but here, the pagans were saintly and Abram was sinister. The Lord gets the credit for this as another form of common grace, but may it never be said of us that our pagan neighbors have a higher moral standard than we do.

For Abram, there was a clear pathway of sin or obedience. I love the way Abimelech expressed this. He said, *In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this. That's a great paradigm, is it not? That you and I would have integrity of heart and innocent hands*. I heard a statistic once stating that for every ticket a person receives for running a stop sign, they have violated it a thousand times. In other words, we are only "caught" in our sin one time out of a thousand. Could it be true that for every violation of "my hands" I have sinned in "my heart" a thousand times? Abimelech was innocent but Abram was guilty. But there was a way out for Abram, but he did not choose it. There is always a way out. God will never put you in a place where you can only choose sin. There is always a way out that will not lead to compromise.

But for me, the real difficulty of these stories is the fact that Pharaoh and Abimelech both sinned in ignorance and were punished, but Abram sinned willfully and was blessed. There is no getting around this. There is not direct word from God condemning what Abram did. We know that Abram did this at least twice and maybe more. It was his pattern everywhere he went. He didn't choose the path of sin once but many times, and he taught his son how to do it in the process—and God never condemned it. Not a word of judgment was spoken. Not an ounce of consequence was applied. Every time he lied he benefited and became more wealthy. This is in the Bible! What do we do with this difficult story?

There are two ways to handle this. The first is to realize that not everything described in Scripture is necessarily permitted. The Bible describes all manner of evil and sin and many times the offenders are not punished and nothing is said. That is often true in Scripture, but here something more is happening. I believe that these three stories of deceit and trickery are summed up in 2 Timothy. *If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself*. (2 Tim 2:13) We can pull lessons out of these stories about lying and adultery, why it's important to make good decisions and why God will never put us in a place of compromise. All of these things are true, but the larger lesson from this is that, if we are faithless, he will remain faithful. God had promised Abram that he would have a great name, become a great nation and possess a great land. Whether or not Abram obeyed or fell into compulsive lying, God's promises could

not fail. God would not let his promises fall to the ground despite the response of his chosen people.

And the same is true for you and me. The good news of the gospel is that it does not depend upon our own righteousness. God does not accept you because you are good, God accepts you because when you place your faith in Christ, you are given the righteousness of Christ. Our lies and bad choices and fear of man are all wiped clean through the blood of Christ. Even when I sin a thousand times in my heart before it reaches my hands, these are made white as snow. This is the lavish grace of God and though it should never cause us to be callous about our sin—as Paul wrote: should I go on sinning so that grace may increase? God forbid! Do not be callous about your sin, but grace is the thing which allows us to stand up after we have fallen, to keep striving when fail. No matter what you are facing today, even if you think you can't go another day in the misery of your sin, cast yourself upon the lavish grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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January 31, 2010

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<sup>1</sup> *Thriving Family*, January/February 2010, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, p. 383