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Abraham's prayer for Abimelech (Gn 20) – an Old Testament model of prayer for one's neighbor

Abstract

This study, based on Genesis 20, where Abraham prays for Abimelech, presents an Old Testament model of intercessory prayer. It explores the theological significance of prayer in the Hebrew Bible and its impact on relationships with God and others. The narrative follows Abraham's journey to the land of Gherar, his encounter with King Abimelech, and the subsequent divine intervention to protect the sanctity of marriage and the promise of an heir. Emphasizing the role of prayer as a tool for spiritual growth and transformation, the study contrasts Abraham's flaws with Abimelech's integrity, highlighting the power of prayer to effect change and divine favor. It discusses Abraham's intercession as foundational, illustrating the importance of praying for others, which aligns with divine will and brings personal blessings. The allegorical interpretations of Abimelech's encounter and the broader implications for understanding biblical narratives are also considered.

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Introduction (about prayer)

"The act by which man turns to God to praise Him or to ask for His favor," prayer is also how we acknowledge our dependence on our Creator and ask Him: "O God, do not forsake me" (Ps 70:18). Even "remembering Him is prayer", which "constitutes a way of knowing" Him, by which God introduces man "into His intimacy" and, if necessary, intervenes in history to fulfill requests. Although words are essential because they express thoughts when we pray, their number matters less; God appreciates the

"inner disposition of the soul," for prayer is more "the sincere outburst of a soul in relationship with its Creator" (Stancu 2018, 226-7).

"Considered among the vital values," prayer can be understood as the work of "the divine Spirit in man," as "the uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity in the human nature and as the graceful life that permeates all that is within us." If "after the work," prayer is "the sustainer of the world," after its appropriation, through it, we accompany and unite ourselves with God, acquiring "a principle of life" which "elevates both body and soul in a deeper register than the biological and the psychic." "Through prayer, man makes the most of God's unmixed presence in creation and His openness to communion, and makes himself the recipient of His grace, thus exalting his life in God." Since "an organic, ontological relationship is established between prayer and life," prayer is "the source of life, in the sense of the ontological regeneration of human life." It is a prayer that "maintains life and ennobles it," it is "a co-working of a man with God in the act of building immortal gods," which means that through it, "a new creation is constantly being made." Prayer is a response given to the Heavenly Father, through which man is ennobled, for "every power of the human being, when it is enriched by prayer, becomes above the world." Since "to be human is to pray," we maintain that "prayer is the defining, fundamental element of the human being." Because it is normal and natural, human nature tends "wholly towards God," and "through prayer," it moves "towards the building origin of all that is." Precisely because he is a "praying creature" (Vlad 2019, 791), man "differs from the animals" and "joins himself to the angels." (John Chrysostom 2005, 88)

Through prayer, man "penetrates" "like a diver into the endless depths of God who, as a loving Person, remains distinct from the one who prays and keeps him distinct as well." (Stăniloae 2004, 669) "Prayer is a temporal deviation from the human self, encompassing it, so that, reaching God, it returns full of fruit, to the same human self, enriching it." (Stan 1983, 514)

Praying involves communicating with the Creator of the universe, a personal Being willing to listen to people, and has included prayer in His divine plan. Thus, "prayer is innate to the human heart," and because it portrays man's paternal relationship with his Creator, it must be understood as "the fellowship of the child of God with his heavenly Father." Keeping the same family ties, man's prayer to God is an "outpouring of the heart before the Creator, and His response is the outpouring of His blessings" (*Bible Dictionary* 1998, 213).

In the Holy Scriptures, "prayers abound", in the pages of which countless episodes are recounted in which "God's people pray." "Like a conversation among friends," "biblical prayer" "presupposes a mutual posture of trust and devotion," for it "offers both comfort/support and challenge," and "its purpose includes serving others" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 888-9).

"Prayer is different from any other type of communication because when we pray, we can expect the One we are praying to understand our incoherent mumblings and translate them into effective prayers." This image corresponds to "that of a loving parent listening to the confused cry of a child" (for "we do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unutterable sighs." cf. Rom 8:26) and which responds to profound but not very well expressed longing" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890).

"A key dimension of the divine-human relationship," prayer "marks the people of God and is rooted in human need and divine love and sufficiency" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890).

In the account in Gherar, God appears to Abimelech in a dream and assures him that, after giving Abraham "the woman back" because he is a prophet, he will pray for him, and so he will live (Phil 20:7).

Of the multitude of Hebrew terms [1], which can be translated as "supplication (prayer)," the Masoretic Text here uses the verb פָּלַל [2] (which can also have the meaning: "to intervene," "to judge" or "to meditate"), – with eight occurrences in the Pentateuch: Gn 20:7,17 [3], 48:11 [4], Nm 11:2, 21:7 (two occurrences, meaning: "to intervene") and Dt 9:20,26 [5]. From the same radical is also formed the noun תְּפִלָּה, which has no occurrence in the Pentateuch.

Alongside the terms mentioned, other "more expressive formulations are preferred: to spread one's heart, to praise, to bless, to rejoice, to sing, to seek the face of God" (Fouilloux et all 1998, 183).

Abraham moves

"No other person is more important to the message of the Torah than the patriarch Abraham, who plays a decisive role in the book of Genesis." A "central figure," the narratives about Abraham are spread over fifteen chapters, during which one can see the importance of his actions, a "distinctive pattern" that "oscillates between the divine promise of a seed, i.e. an heir, and the persistent complications that threaten to

thwart the fulfillment of that promise." Thus, this episode (Gn 20) is the "complication" that followed the divine "promise" of an heir (Gn 17-18) and preceded the "fulfillment" of Isaac's birth (21) (Kaiser 2001, 173-4).

After only fifteen years in Mamvri's grove, the patriarch "moved his camp again to the south of the country," "to that land where once Hagar had fled because of her mistress Sarra's emplacements." Probably, "the terrible calamity that had fallen upon the valley of Sodom with its five cities, the appearance of this desolate place, the idea of ruin [...] made the whole surrounding locality unbearable for the docile patriarch" (Lopuhin 1944, 349), who found himself unable to practice hospitality, for, because of the destroyed cities, there were no more travelers to cross the threshold and stay (Ginzberg 2003, 216).

From Hebron, the "chief home" of Abraham, the patriarch, he traveled, from time to time, "some distance in search of better pastures for his flocks." This may be another reason why the patriarch also reached Gherar [6], a Philistine city "close to the seashore," at a distance of "65 km. from Hebron" (Halley 1983, 100).

For other commentators, Abraham chose to go "to a lonely region where there were no connections with the wilderness of Shur" because he intended "to live in some seclusion." It is argued that Abraham "only occasionally went to the city of Gherar, probably for supplies," wishing to "isolate himself" before the birth of Isaac (Wurmbrant 1994, 80).

Although some exegetes consider that we have here an example of a "double narrative" (from "different sources"), that this story is the same as the one from Egypt, related earlier (Gn 12:10-20), chapter 20 did not arrive in the book of Genesis by chance, "but was carefully placed by its author where it is and in its present form." So, to discover the meaning of this narrative, we must relate it to "the whole book" and "take into account both the factors that were carefully prepared by the preceding chapters and those that are covered by the following chapters. The key factor seems to be related to the seed promised to Abraham from Sarra." This view is confirmed "by how the events of Abraham's life are chosen to be placed throughout the narrative." For example, if the distance of the events recounted in chapter 17 from the previous one is 13 years, in five consecutive chapters (17-21), the events take place "at an interval of not more than one year", and in chapter 23, the event recounted is at a distance of 15 years. Tracing the "frequency of the events related" in the book of Genesis, "on the time axis of the life" of the patriarch, we see a concentration of five chapters when Abraham was 99-100 years

old, which proves the importance of the events related there. If fourteen chapters cover about a hundred years of Abraham's life, five of them "focus on the events surrounding the birth of Isaac." Thus, "how the narrative has been constructed draws our attention to its focal point: Isaac," "the unique bearer of the seed from which, in the perspective of history, that seed of the woman was to be born, which would crush the head of the serpent (Gn 3:15)" (Sansgău 2009, 121-2).

St. John Chrysostom presents the "right Abraham" as a stranger and traveler on earth, for "he did not settle in any place" and "all his wealth was only in servants and flocks!" "Look at the life of the righteous, how simple and humble it was! They moved easily from place to place. They ordered their lives as if they were strangers and travelers on earth. They pitched their tents here and there as if they lived in a foreign land." (John Chrysostom 1989, 128)

Although Scripture does not tell us the reason for Abraham's move, it can be seen that the patriarch "did not move in vain and without purpose," if he had not moved his "tent," "how would all the Gerasenes have known how much God cares for him?" "Because of the trials" he was subjected to, "the virtue of the right shone more brightly." Before, "when he went down to Egypt," he was "a stranger," "a stranger," and "one whom no one knew," but he returned "suddenly laden with much honor." Likewise, when he "dwelt temporarily" in Gherar, "at first" he did nothing remarkable, "but later he enjoyed so much help from God that the king and all the inhabitants there served him rightly with all eagerness" (John Chrysostom 1989, 129-133).

From "God's silence" about moving from the place where he had lived "in fellowship with God" to Mamvri, where he had interceded to save Sodom, now turned into a "smoking valley" full of ruins, we can assume that "Abraham acted on his initiative, without direct direction from God." Quite a dangerous action, "a wrong move," "ready to be made a matt by God" (Phillips 1992, 199-200).

Abraham in Gherar

"What an extraordinary continuation of the previous chapter!" After hosting God Himself (Gn 17) and boldly interceding for the inhabitants of Sodom, it is amazing to observe Abraham behaving in Gherar with the same fear he showed in Egypt (Gn 12:10-20). The way this chapter is phrased presupposes knowledge of the previous episodes. It is noteworthy that Abimelech was so God-fearing and pious compared to the Sodomites; on the other hand, it is interesting that for the second time, Sarra is

taken into a royal harem, this time very shortly before she gives birth to Isaac (Wenham 2003, 54).

The events recounted in chapter 20 teach us about the relationship between Abraham and God. In parting with Lot, Abraham shows his "victory in giving up the treasures of Sodom," and in "the matter of the destruction of Sodom," a "memorable intercession" came to light. We do not know how much time had passed since the news was received at Mamvri, but there is a possibility that, at that time, "Sarah was already with child, and even if she was not, the time prophesied by the Lord was under pressure of events." So we know neither the exact time nor the reasons that led Abraham to live in Gherar "as a stranger," what happened to the patriarch, "how did he forget his experience in Egypt? How was such a fall possible, after all he had experienced in the past year?." Some commentators suggest that "things are, it seems, left unclear," believing that the devil was „no stranger to the plans God had for Abraham." Thus, on this occasion, "more than ever before, the promised Seed itself was in danger" (Sansgău 2009, 120-1).

The structure of chapter 20, which relates to this episode, is interesting. The chapter opens with two introductory verses, which geographically locate the event and set out the "method/tactics" Abraham adopts to escape with his life and the consequence of declaring Sarah his sister. Beginning in verse 3, the action occurs in a dream, presenting the dialogue between God and Abimelech. Not only does God initiate the conversation, but He is also the One who responds and assures Abimelech of His omniscience and that He Himself has kept him from sin. If the first intervention resembles a divine decree: "You shall die for the woman whom you have taken, for she has a husband" (Gn 20:3), after Abimelech disavows himself by showing that he did not know this fact, in the end, although the command remains just as firm: "And now give the man back his wife", he is presented with two options: to obey and live, or to resist God, and then, "you know that you will surely die, you and all of you." At the same time, God also presents the benefits of choosing good, for the "man" from whom he took the woman "is a prophet and will pray for you and you will live" (Gn 20:7). From verse 8 onwards, the events recounted no longer take place in a dream, and present Abimelech, who soon ("in the morning" Gn 20:8) relates to all his servants [7] the dialogue he had with God in the dream, and calls Abraham to carry out the divine command. A conversation with Abraham follows, in which the latter has to answer Abimelech's question: "What have you done to us? What have we done wrong to you [...]? [...] What

have you done to us that you have done this?" (Gn 20:9-10). Abraham's strategy of declaring his wife to be his sister is based on the following three rationales: 1. he believed that "through that land, the fear of God is lacking" and that he would be "killed for the woman's sake"; 2. his statement is true because his wife "is indeed his sister after his father, but not after his mother"; and 3. this statement is a decision made by mutual consent, for, with their wanderings, he convinced his wife to say about him: "He is my brother" (Gn 20:11-13). Verses 14-16 depict Abimelech returning to Sarra and giving her many valuable gifts. The final verses, 17-18, depict Abraham praying to God, who brings healing.

From a historical perspective, after the episode at Mamvri Oak, after the destruction of Sodom and the rescue of Lot, Scripture tells us that Abraham went from there to the south to the king of the Philistines [8], where he agreed with Sarra not to say she was his wife but his sister. Abimelech [9] takes Sarra into his harem, but God reveals to him that He Himself did not allow him to touch her [10]. Sarra is returned to Abraham, who is reproached for the lie (Origen 2006, 263).

However, the letter alone should not understand this episode. The Christian and Paul's disciples know that "the law is spiritual," and allegories must be sought. Through prayer, the Lord Himself will lift the "veil of the letter," and the "light of the Spirit" will be revealed (Origen 2006, 265).

Suppose the literal meaning of the scriptural words ("Abimelech [...] had not touched her") "indicates holiness and purity". In that case, however, there is a "deeper meaning" the encounter between Abimelech and Sarra is symbolic of the encounter of a "foolish soul" who "does not wish to attain or approach virtue and is unable to do so because of his peculiar nature" (Philo 1953, 342). Thus, for Origen, Abimelech's wife is "called natural philosophy," and his handmaidens "point to the various and special reasonings of dialectic" (Origen 2006, 269).

These events are presented in Scripture through a chiastic structure, after the two introductory themes, the presentation of Abraham's plan and its consequence, there follow three themes during Abimelech's dream: the dialogue with God, the divine command to return his wife, and God's assurance to Abimelech that the prophet will pray for him. These themes are repeated in the second part of the chapter: Abimelech informs his subjects of the dream and then fulfills the divine commands he has received, and finally, the prophet prays for Abimelech.

By threatening Abimelech with death, God shows that "He is more than a bystander on the edge of history" and that He "can overcome the evil in His people, even through the lives of sinners," for in this incident, "the pagan Abimelech acted more righteously than Abraham, God's friend" (MacDonald 2002, 54).

Although Abraham initially considers the people of Gherar to be "unrighteous, ungodly, and heathen" and places Abimelech "among the people who have neither knowledge, nor law, nor God," their actions later showed them to be "a people who feared God and honor and guarded human righteousness." Thus, referring to this initial attitude, Evgeny Vulgaris says of Abraham that he "was wicked," that "it was a wrong grasp at first," but "later it was proved by deeds and the patriarch himself" that "often good deeds dwell where one counts them banished," and "wickedness is encased where no one suspects it." (Vulgaris 2012, 61)

Abraham is a prophet

Although this is the first place in Scripture where someone is called a prophet, Abraham does not live up to expectations, for we would expect a divine representative to be "beyond reproach, both in his personal and public life" and his integrity to be "beyond question" (Phillips 1992, 200), but God "holds Abraham in the high rank of His representative, a prophet who speaks in His name" (Gn 20:7) "and as an intercessor whose prayers are answered" (Koechlin 2005, 31) (Gn 20:17).

The prophet was "offering a message" from the deity. Still, in this case, we see "a more complex picture of a prophet as one who has close relations with the deity" for Abraham does more, is "able to intercede," "prays for the healing" of Abimelech (Walton et al. 2021, 54).

Jewish legend holds that Abraham, being a prophet, "knew beforehand the danger" he would be in if he "revealed the whole truth" and at the same time "knew" that Abimelech would not touch Sarra (Ginzberg 2003, 216).

Although Abraham "committed this deception, he was still the prophet" on whom and on whose prayer "depended" the very "welfare of Abimelech." "God is not ashamed to appropriate an unbelieving, lying, deceitful man as His prophet" because "Abraham had the main thing: love, faith, longing for a heavenly homeland" (Wurmbrant 1994, 82).

"Abraham's right soul was beset with the most tyrannical passions, and fear terrified him." Because the fear of death was more significant than the fear that his

wife would fall into the hands of strangers, "he preferred to see with his own eyes how the companion of his life would fall into the hands of the king." However, St. John Chrysostom does not blame the patriarch "for smallness of soul" in fearing death but urges us to understand Abraham. If, for Christians, Christ made it "easy to despise death," for now "it is no longer death, but sleep, a journey, a moving from a worse place to a better," then it was "fearful and bitter" and "shook the souls of the righteous" of the Old Testament (John Chrysostom 1989, 129-130).

The difficulty of understanding this passage can only be overcome if we interpret it in an allegorical key [11]. Thus, Abraham no longer wants virtue (Sarra) to be called his wife and to be alone; he wants to share it with others. Although Abraham "now wishes to share the gift of divine virtue with the Gentiles," "it is not yet time for the grace of God to pass ... to the Gentiles" (Origen 2006, 269).

Abraham is not a "betrayer of the laws of marriage" but "a wise man" (*τὸν σοφόν*), and Sarra is the virtue (*ἀρετῆς*) that rightfully belongs to the wise man and which Abimelech, an "impure, licentious and unbridled lustful king" who disregards "the laws concerning strangers," desires. Like the "wicked" who "pretend to be champions," Abimelech desires virtue (on Sarra), "but not by hard work and effort" but by abducting it (Philo 1953, 341).

Philo calls Abimelech "a foolish man" because he "violently insists that he possesses virtue," but "is convinced by the divine Logos, which enters into his soul, examines him, searches him and compels him to confess that this is the possession of another man and not his own." "Virtue is foreign to foolish men, who deem it worthy to be owned as a wife and not as a sister," she "may indeed be a kinswoman" to such a man, "as to a brother," but virtue cannot be a "true wife" only to "the perfect man" (Philo 1953, 342, 346).

Because "only with a virtuous partner as a wife" can one live "an immortal soul-life" (Philo 1953, 345), Origen considers Sarra, whose name has the meaning of "ruler" or "holder of primacy," the very "virtue of the spirit": *ἀρετή* (Origen 2006, 265).

Virtue "has no mother and has no part in the female sex, but is sown only by the Father of all, who has no need of material substance for His generation." In this way, "the just man is a consort of justice, the ignorant man of ignorance, the sincere man of sincerity, the godly man of godliness, and [...] the wise man of wisdom." Using Sarra, Philo tries to show that virtue is related to the male gene of man, not to the female (Philo 1894, 105,347).

Like a man "skilled in every kind of wisdom" (called a "gnostic" by St. Clement of Alexandria), the patriarch does not put marriage "before love of God and living in righteousness," for "having borne children," "his wife is his sister," "they are as if they both had the same father [....]; that she will indeed be his sister after she has separated herself from the body, which by the appropriation of the bodily structure divides and separates [...]; that the souls [...] are equal, and neither of them is either male or female [...] neither marries nor is married" (Clement of Alexandria 1982, 43, 442).

Abimelech represents the "scholars and sages of the age" who are dedicated to philosophy but who "do not reach the full and perfect doctrine of faith, observe that God is the father and king of all." However, they "devoted their efforts to the purification of the heart", seeking "with all their soul and with all perseverance the infusion of divine virtue," God did not "allow" them to "attain" virtue, for it was determined that this grace should be "given to the Gentiles," not through Abraham, "but through Christ" (Origen 2006, 267, 269). Understood in this way, this episode may constitute Abimelech's initiation into wisdom/faith, which becomes a typos of the Gentile Church (Septuagint 2004, 97).

"Every virtuous man," "every good man," is a prophet, for he says nothing about himself, but "is the resounding instrument of God's voice" (Philo 1894, 146). The prophet is the "herald" of God's will, a person like Abraham, who has "privileged relations with God" (Usca 2008, 222).

Why did Abraham say that Sarra was his sister?

He told the truth. Indeed, Sarra was a wife/sister [12], i.e. she married her half-sister. In those days, such a marriage "was not considered taboo incest, being rather a way of ensuring that girls born of secondary marriages enjoyed the protection of the family" (Walton et all 2021, 54).

Abraham's wife is mentioned for the first time with the name Sarai (Gn 11:29), which in Hebrew שָׂרָי means "my princess." Her name will be changed to Sarra (Gn 17:15), which in Hebrew שָׂרָה can also be translated as "princess." The Book of Genesis records her with Abraham, coming from the Chaldean Ur and accompanying the patriarch on all his journeys. Among her independent actions, we can note the contrary attitude of the handmaid Hagar and Ishmael (one interpreted symbolically by St. Paul the Apostle. cf. Gal 4:22-31). She played an essential role in her two journeys (Egypt and Gherar), where she accepted Abraham's strategy of

declaring herself his sister. "A beautiful woman in appearance" (Gn 12:11), full of faith ("By faith Sarra herself received power to bear a son [...] She counted him faithful who had promised") and conjugal affection (".. . as Sarra submitted to Abraham, calling him Lord" cf. 1 Pt 3:6), Sarra would live 121 years and be buried in the cave of Machpelah (*Smith's Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible* 1901, 970).

"We must also marvel at Sarra's great love"; by her attitude, she "wanted to escape the danger of death by right." Although she "could have discovered the truth and escaped reproach," she "endured everything with courage, only to save the just. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful analogy with the text of Scripture (Gn 2:24) and shows that this decision, although taken by the two, was made "as if they were one body, so they cared for each other's salvation; and there was such understanding between them as if they were one body and one soul." [13]

It was cowardly. Abraham deserves rebuke for denying his wife for the second time. Even if this is a "half-truth," commentators wonder how it was possible for such a "privileged man, enjoying intimacy with God," to lose "awareness of his relationship" and fail "to bear witness." Abraham is accused of "losing" godliness and using "unfortunate" language when he describes his divine calling thus: "God brought me out of my father's house to wander" (Gn 20:13). Consequently, "it is necessary for God to repeat His lessons until evil is judged from the root and confessed." Although God sometimes, for teaching purposes, "gives a lesson" to His chosen ones, He even then "continues to watch over them with gentleness" (Koechlin 2005, 31).

The biblical patriarchs presented their wives as sisters because of the "fear" of death. However, Scripture portrays such episodes as "not at all flattering." Indeed, it repeats them (three times), "each scene" in turn occurring after God makes a promise/pledge (Skulski 2012, 90).

Abraham resorted to "the dosing of the truth" because of his "unbounded" faith "in the help from above." He had faith that "no matter how dangerous the road, no matter how difficult the situation," God would help him, he had "hope in the Almighty Providence and faith in his high purpose made Abraham at ease and sustained in himself the hope of all good even in the most critical situations" (Lopuhin 1944, 351).

The patriarch's action should not be defended, but, rather, his mistake should be acknowledged, for, by his statement, he "led them astray" and "had already committed a sin against them," which brought upon them "a great sin, and it did not matter, at all, whether the statement was true or false" (Ramban 1971-1976). Instead of fearing for his

life and forgetting that God had the power to save them, Abraham should have shown more faith (Skulski 2012, 91).

Thus, some commentators argue that the hero of this chapter is not Abraham but Abimelech, who did not even know that Sarra was Abraham's wife and who, had he not been stopped by God, would have been guilty only of unintentional wrongdoing.

"Abimelech was without sin; but the good Master brought this punishment upon the king, so that by the prayers of Abraham, he might lift his punishment, thereby making him more just and famous and more illustrious. Yes, God makes and orchestrates everything and orders everything, so those who serve Him may shine like stars, and their virtue may be known everywhere." (John Chrysostom, 1989, 136)

If Abraham is depicted in an exalted posture in the previous chapters, now his "character" "simply fades into the shadow of the integrity of the Philistine Abimelech." It is very clear that the biblical author "carefully" builds "the contrast between Abimelech and Abraham." This is why, "out of the multitude of events of the century of Abraham's life," the author has chosen "only fifteen," among which this one must also have a place. "For one who seemed to have become God's counselor and friend," the Hagiographer could easily have replaced this event with a more favorable one or ignored it, as he probably "did with hundreds and hundreds of other events in his existence," but did not. Perhaps he didn't want to miss "something important of what he intended to communicate to his contemporaries and future generations." If not the saintly author, perhaps "the Spirit of God was determined that this chapter should be part" of the Book of Genesis to show that God fulfills his promises even though his most chosen collaborators are not faultless or invulnerable (Sansgău 2009, 124-126).

Called before Abimelech and his servants to explain his statements and behavior, Abraham fails by offering a "miserable, incoherent, shaky explanation," for towards God, he proved "untrustworthy, as a man he proved dishonest," and towards himself, he "disgraced himself." [14]

By explaining to Abimelech, Abram shows himself distrustful of God, dishonest as a man and dishonored by himself. "Of all forms of dishonesty, none is worse" than half-truth (Phillips 1992, 202).

It is a real "tragedy" that Abraham repeats the mistake of Egypt, that those "disastrous" experiences taught him nothing. Scripture does not hide the sins or shortcomings of the righteous. Like the patriarch, we too "are delivered from a wrongdoing by divine mercy, grace, and intervention" but immediately "slip back ... into

a similar situation." Abraham goes down the same road "where he had fallen once again years before" (Phillips 1992, 198).

"It seems incredible that a man who has won so many victories," who has been so much in the presence of God, "should stumble so badly, so soon." "Behind the whole incident" was Satan, "who was making a last-ditch attempt to prevent the birth of Isaac and, consequently, the birth" of Jesus (Phillips 1992, 199).

"Unfounded fear" drives Abraham back to sin, a sin "all the more grievous because it was repeated," and Sarah "was now with a child of promise" (Wurmbrant 1994, 80).

If it was this fear of death that led Abraham to this plan to claim Sarra as his sister, the fear of death from the frightening dream in which he "dreamed himself dead," [15] brought Abimelech to reality. Since his moral principles were far from those required by God, not even a lie could excuse his "promiscuity." "Abimelech's code" allowed him to approach any desire to gratify his pleasures. It seemed natural to him to use his power to exercise his prerogatives without regard to the desires of others but simply "throw the cloak of legality over his passions" (Phillips 1992, 201).

Human laws can be very flexible, written to satisfy the desires of the powerful. Today, laws are rewritten to "satisfy the wayward." Laws that make "concessions to human desires" do not please God (Phillips 1992, 202).

"Abimelech's last examination" (Gn 20:6-7) shows that only divine intervention prevented him from sinning and that obedience to the divine command was not due to a sense of love of righteousness but "fear of punishment" (Phillips 1992, 202).

Ginsburg believes that this episode can be understood as a new "assault/attack" in the perspective of the "Great Controversy" (The Companion Bible 2005, 28), in which the devil sought to destroy the promised seed of man immediately after the fall (Gn 3:15).

Because the "promised seed" will come through Sarra, we can assume that "the whole incident was planned by the Evil One, either to prevent the birth of Isaac or to discredit that birth" and to consider Isaac the son of Abimelech. To guard Sarra and silence such suspicions, God defies Satan's plan by making all the women of Abimelech's household barren (Phillips 1992, 206). For the "promise of the heir" of Abraham and Sarra, "lawfully conceived," was to be fulfilled, and nothing was to "delay the fulfillment of the divine promise" (Lopuhin 1944, 351).

Abimelech chose Sarra not because he was "charmed by the beauty of a 90-year-old woman,"[16] who had either grown younger or had not yet grown old ("withered/old"), but perhaps "to ally herself with Abraham, a wealthy, prince-nomad" (Keil & Delitzsch 1885, 239).

The reason for divine intervention is theological: We want divine protection of Sarra in order to fulfill the promise (Brown et al. 2007, 66). However, some cynics believed that Isaac was conceived with Abimelech because he did not give birth the entire time he was with Abraham (Rashi 1970, 52). Such a conception is not supported by Scripture, which emphasizes "... Isaac the son of Abraham" (Gn 25:19).

Abraham prays

Because prayer is a dialogue with God, Adam and Eve prayed; because prayer is an offering to God of his best, Abel prayed; when Seth began "to call on the name of the Lord God," he prayed. Because the one who prays experiences the intimacy of God, when righteous and righteous Noah "walked with God" (Gn 6:9), he prayed. Also, prior to the episode in Gherar, we note Abraham's prayer for his barren wife (Gn 15:1-4) and intercession (prayer-negotiation) for the people of Sodom (Gn 18:16-33).

Even though Scripture does not mention it, Abraham prayed for Sarra before praying for Abimelech. St. Ephrem the Syrian, believes that "sleep [17] fell quickly upon Abimelech" precisely because Abraham prayed so diligently (Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 165).

"Thanks to Abraham's prayer," God heals Abimelech so that his wife and his maidservants are no longer barren" (Origen 2006, 263). Abraham's prayer was of great use, for no physician was able to do what Abraham did. Sin caused Abimelech's problem, and "no physician but the great Physician Jesus Christ" could treat this disease (Phillips 1992, 206).

Although God tells him that "his salvation depended on it," Scripture gives us no indication that Abimelech asked Abraham to pray [18] for him or to tell him about the "living and true God" or salvation. On the contrary, some believe that Abimelech "intentionally" dishonors Abraham by offering him animals (20:14), pushing him away and despising him. Accordingly, it is believed that because Abraham does not stand out positively during the events of Gherar, "true spiritual greatness" will be seen in the end. Without looking elsewhere for the culprits, Abraham knows he is responsible for the "sad circumstances." He understands that Abimelech rightly refuses him "his services

as a prophet," but if he "missed the opportunity to preach to him," he can still "pray for him" (Phillips 1992, 204-5).

Other commentators consider that Abraham, by his words of vindication, not only "appeased the king's anger and revealed his virtue; but at the same time, he also gave them a teaching about honoring God" (John Chrysostom 1989, 134).

"Mediation" through prayer causes God to "open again the womb" of the women of Abimelech's house. "The irony is that Abimelech is denied the right to have children, just as much as he denies Abraham the right to have a wife" (Walton et al. 2021, 54).

Fulfilling Abraham's request, "it was the first time in human history that God fulfilled the prayer of one human being for the benefit of another." (Ginzberg 2003, 217)

Scripture places this event before chapter 21, where God is reported to have remembered Sarra (Gn 21:1), and she became pregnant, to show that Abraham's prayer for Abimelech was a lesson. One who prays for his neighbor when he is in greater need of that gift, for Abraham, prays that Abimelech would have children (Gn 20:17-18), but he did not (Rashi 1970, 46).

Abraham demonstrates a great virtue: forgiveness (a divine attribute, for the Lord is called, in the sixth blessing of the Amida prayer: "He who forgives abundantly." (cf. *Prayers for the Day of Atonement* 5709-1949, 34). Jewish tradition insists that man must not be content with God's forgiveness but must strive to obtain that of his neighbor. If God is willing to forgive from the first signs of repentance, man is also urged to imitate and appropriate this divine quality. So does Abraham, who forgave Abimelech and prayed to God for his healing (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaism* 2001, 347).

A parallel with two other events: Abraham and Sarai in Egypt (Gn 12:10-20) and Isaac and Rebekah in Gherar (Gn 26:1-16)

"Introducing your wife as your sister does not seem like the kind of thing" a righteous, God-fearing man should do [19], but in the book of Genesis, "this is not singular but happens three times" (Skulski 2012, 89). Abraham thus introduces Sarra twice (Gn 12:10-20 and 20:1-18) and Isaac once to Rebekah (Gn 26:1-16).

Some scholars consider this chapter an insertion of an "Elohist document into the narrative plot of the Iachus," which "presents a parallel event" to chapter 20, "but without taking into account the chronology of the context," because "Sarra was no longer a young woman." Archbishop Ananias points out that even the

adherents of this theory consider that "the main emphasis [...] falls on the idea that God intervenes in time to defend morals threatened by premature and unnecessary precautions" (*Bible or Holy Scripture* 2001, 41).

The similarities with the other two events cannot be denied, but "it is equally foolish" to claim that it is the same event handed down by tradition in "three different forms." No less than six significant differences can be pointed out: two different places (Egypt and Gherar), two different monarchs with different characters (the idolatrous Pharaoh and the God-fearing Abimelech), different circumstances (famine and migration), different ways of discovering the truth (Pharaoh intuits it, in plagues sent by God, and Abimelech receives, in a dream, the divine revelation), different reactions (silence and offering explanations to Abimelech) and different conclusions (forced to leave Egypt and invited to stay in Gherar). It is as straightforward as possible that we are not dealing with "two versions of the same tradition" but with two events, which, although similar, are distinct, as they took place twenty years apart (Leupold 1942, 310).

Origen also notes some differences between the two events: The pharaoh (which can be translated as "he who destroys") does not want Sarra "with a pure heart," but Abimelech (whose name can be translated as "my father is king") wants virtue with a pure heart, so he acts differently from the pharaoh, who is ignorant and unclean (Origen 2006, 267).

The existence of two distinct events is proved by the difference between Abimelech and Pharaoh, by the superiority of the former, who had "a pure heart and innocent hands" (Gn 20:5), over Pharaoh.

The differences are instructive (educational/pedagogical): Abimelech did not abuse Sarra, which was not explicitly said about Pharaoh. Abraham's so-called lie becomes a mere mental restriction since Sarra was indeed his half-sister. God intervenes directly, like a "guardian of morality" (de Vaux 1962, 99) "lest the promise" made by God to Abraham be spoiled by something, for "the time was at hand" (John Chrysostom 1989, 131).

Analyzed, the three episodes are to be understood as "typical scenes," which can be interpreted by determining "how they differ from each other," giving us the possibility to reach a better "understanding of the biblical character." Analyzing the three scenes, one can see the "dramatic differences" between the Isaac-Rebekah scene,

"in which God does not intervene at all, and the other two scenes," in which God makes his presence felt (Skulski 2012, 92-93).

To many commentators, "it seems incredible" that Abraham still tried to "recommend Sarra" as his sister, even now, "twenty years after the first mistake" in Egypt (MacDonald 2002, 54).

From an allegorical perspective, Pharaoh is the "unclean and destructive man" who could not receive virtue (Sarra); Abimelech, who lived pure and philosophically, "could at least receive it, for he sought with a pure heart; but the time had not yet come." Virtue "remains in circumcision" in Abraham until the Incarnation, when, through Christ, it passes "into the Church of the Gentiles" and "the house of Abimelech and his handmaids" because they have been healed, "will give birth to the sons of the Church" (Origen 2006, 271).

Conclusions

Following the Saviour's exhortation ("Search the Scriptures" Jn 5:39), St. John Chrysostom shows that to be able to reap "the profit they have," to bring to light the great "treasure" that "lies hidden" in the depths of Scripture, "research" is needed ("let us search again the words of Scripture") so that then "we can use them for our benefit" (John Chrysostom 1989, 128).

The "prayers of the saints" (Rev 5:8, 8:3-4) are prayed in heaven before the divine throne by angels or by those already in heaven.

"God's intention" is not that people pray only for themselves but also "for one another" (Lesetre 1912, 669). Alongside Abraham, who prayed for Abimelech (Gn 20:7,17) there are plenty of other Old Testament examples: Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to pray to God for him (Ex 8:8,28, 9:28, 10:17), Job prays for his friends (42:8,10), Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray for the people (Jr 37:3) and the people renew this request (Jr 42:2,20). As Christ prayed for his disciples (Jn 17:9,20,21), we can even speak of "the obligation to pray for others" (Col 1:3,9, 2 Thes 1:11) since the Old Testament (1 Kgs 7:5, 12:23).

The man who lives his daily life in a constant rush blames the "lack of time" to excuse himself for the lack of prayer. Lacking prayer, modern man "cannot see his failings and to communicate them to God, to ask Him for help to rise from them." All the more, "prayer for others becomes nonsense" as long as there is no time to pray for yourself, you cannot pray for others (Cocoșilă 2014).

After Abraham prays for Abimelech (Gn 20:17), God "searches out Sarra" (Gn 21:1). The place of these biblical accounts is not incidental; they are meant to teach us that if one prays for another, "when he needs the thing for which he prays, he is answered first." In this regard, Rashi shows that Sarra became pregnant before Abimelech was healed (Rashi 1970, 46).

Although God had promised Abraham an heir (Gn 15:4) with the covenant made thirty years earlier, it was not until Abraham prayed for Abimelech that Sarah became pregnant "immediately," so that the power of prayer for another could be seen, "who was able to bring to fulfillment a promise that had lain dormant" for so many years. The rabbis argue that one can pray for another before praying for oneself for two reasons: either the other's problem bothers him more than his troubles or because "he wants to receive the reward first" (Chumash 2008, 121).

When one person prays for another and "sweetens a Divine Judgment, the flow of blessing descends into the soul of the one who prayed, and from there, the blessing spreads to other souls. Therefore, if the person who prayed needs the same blessing as the one for whom he prays, he will receive the blessing first, since his soul is the channel through which the blessing enters the world" (Chumash 2008, 120).

The difference between asking for something for another and praying for it is bargaining (see the Sodom episode) and praying (see the Gherar episode). Abraham then bargained for the lives of the Sodomites without the outcome of his bargaining affecting his existence. Now the involvement is total, what he prays to God for Abimelech's house is what he wants most.

On this occasion, through Abraham, we are taught how to pray for ourselves through prayer for one another. As God heard the patriarch's prayer and brought fruitfulness to those Philistines, so will he hear our prayer. Through a holy but also practical pedagogy, God teaches us, even through the negative experiences of others, that the power of prayer does not consist in (magic) formulas but is a way of life, a way of action, a confession.

Christ taught us to use "prayer as a way of service, not as a means of gaining personal power" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890). Prayer is not "a spare tire" to be used only in crises; it should be the "steering wheel" of life, guiding us through the events of daily life.

"King, Helper, Deliverer, and Shield. Blessed are You, O Lord, Shield of Abraham." [20]

Notes

In the Pentateuch, to express this action, in addition to the verb פָּלַל, eight other Hebrew terms can be mentioned, which the Masoretic Text uses:

עָתַר – Gn 25:21 (it is interesting that the two occupations in this verse have different meanings: "to pray" and "to implore," respectively: "to listen," "to answer," "to grant," this being due to the different verbal forms: paal-active, respectively niphal-passive), Ex 8:8-9 (meaning "to pray"). In the other six occupations (e.g., Ex 9:28, 1-:17-18, translated by the Septuagint προσεύχομα and εὔχομαι in the following verse), the meaning is: "to make a request." This verb has only 20 occurrences in the Old Testament.

פָּגַע – the verb can be translated: "to pray," "to implore" or "to intercede" and has eight occurrences in the Pentateuch (Gn 23:8, 28:11, 32:1, Ex 5:3,20, 23:4, Nm 35:19,21) and 76 in the Old Testament. Although in chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis, the meaning of the verb is: "to meet" or "to intercede," for the expression וּפִגְעוּ-לִי בְּעֶפְרֹן has the meaning: "meet, for me, with Ephron," it was translated by Archbishop Ananias: "ask Ephron on my behalf." The other two occupations in the Book of Genesis have different meanings: in chapter 28: "to come" and "to arrive," and in chapter 32: "to meet," and can be related to the act of prayer, for the verb is used to relate Jacob's arrival in Bethel, the House of God and the gate of heaven (Gn 28:17) and his encounter with the angels of God's camp at Mahanaim, "who met him," according to Archbishop Ananias' translation. In four of the other five occurrences in the Books of Exodus and Numbers, the verb means "to meet" or "to welcome." Interestingly, in the same chapter 5, a few verses apart, the meaning is different: "to fall upon," referring to the Divine Justice, Who will allow the "plague/plague" and "sword" to "fall upon" the people if they do not offer a sacrifice (Gn 5:3).

כָּפַר – In the Book of Genesis, the verb has only two occurrences: Gn 6:14 (with the meaning: "to cover") and 32:20 (with the meaning: "to calm," "to appease"). In the following three books, the verb is used intensively. In the Book of Exodus, the verb has 10 occurrences: 29:33,362(twice),37, 30:102, 15-162, 32:30. In the Book of Leviticus, there are 49 occurrences: 1:4, 4:20,26,31,35, 5:6,10,13,16,18, 6:7 (5:26 in the Septuagint, 6:6 in Archbishop Ananias' translation), 7:7, 8:15,34, 9:72, 10:17, 12:7-8, 14:18-21,29,31,53, 15:15,30, 16:6,10-11,16-172,18,20,24,27,30,32,333,34, 17:112, 19:22,28. In the Book of Numbers, there are 16 occurrences: 5:8, 6:11, 8:11-12,19,21, 15:25,282, 16:46-47, 25:13, 28:22,30, 29:5, 31:50, 35:33. Used 75 times throughout the three books, the verb has the following meanings: "to sanctify," "to make atonement," "to atone," "to cleanse," "to redeem." In the Book of Deuteronomy, there are only three occurrences: 21:82, and 32:43, and the verb has the meaning: "to forgive," "to have mercy," and "to cleanse." Of the 104 occurrences of the verb in the Old Testament, 80 are in the Pentateuch.

נֶדֶר – the noun has 60 occurrences in the Old Testament, of which 34 are in the Pentateuch. It is translated in Romanian: "prayer" (Lv 21:23) or "promise": The two occupations in the Book of Genesis (28:20, 31:13), the six in the Book of Leviticus (7:16, 12:18,21,23, 23:38, 27:2), the 20 in the Book of Numbers (6:2,5,21, 15:3,8, 21:2, 29:39, 30:2-9,11-14) and the six in the Book of Deuteronomy (12:6,11,17,26, 23:18,21), have the meaning of "oath," "promise" or "offering."

נָפַל – is a verb used very often in the Old Testament, having 435 occurrences, 58 of them in the Pentateuch (Gn 2:21, 4:5-6, 14:10, 15:12, 17:3,17, 24:64, 25:18, 33:4, 43:18, 44:14, 45:14, 46:29, 49:17, 50:1,18, Ex 15:16, 19:21, 21:18,27,33, 32:28, Lv 9:24, 11:32-33,35,37-38, 26:7-8,36, Nm 5:21-22,27, 6:12, 14:3,5,29,32,43, XVI,4,22,45, 20:6, 24:4,16, 34:2, 35:23, Dt 9:18,25, 21:1, 22:4,8, 25:2) and has the meaning: "to fall on one's face", "to prostrate oneself". It is worth noting that, of the eight occurrences in the Book of Deuteronomy, in two cases (9:18,25), the verb has been translated into Romanian: "I prayed".

עָבַד – of the 289 occurrences in the Old Testament, 113 are in the Pentateuch. The verb has the meanings "to worship" (Ex 3:12, 12:31, 20:5, Dt 4:19, 5:9, 6:13, 8:19, 13:6) and "to serve" (Gn 14:4, 15:13-14, 25:23, 27:29,40, 29:15,18,20,25,27,30, 30:26,29, 31:6,41, Ex 1:13-14, 3:12, 4:23, 7:16, 8:1,20, 9:1,13, 10:3,7-8,11,24,26, 12:31, 13:5, 14:12, 20:5, 21:2,6, 23:24-25,33, Lv 25:39-40, Nm 6:24,26, 8:15,25, 18:7,21, Dt 4:19,28, 5:9, 6:13, 7:4,16, 8:19, 10:12,20, 11:13,16, 12:2,30, 13:2,4,6,13, 15:12, 17:3, 20:11, 28:14,36,47-48,64, 29:18,26, 30:17, 31:20. In Dt 13:6, the Hebrew verb "to say" was translated by Archbishop Ananias: "to pray". Thus, the Hebrew expression "in secret he said: let us go and serve other gods" has been translated into Romanian: "he will pray to you in secret saying..."

חָנַן – the verb has 78 occurrences in the Old Testament, ten of which are in the Pentateuch. Translated into Romanian "to pity," the term has several meanings: "to give with kindness," "to act with kindness" (cf. 28:5,11), "to have mercy" (cf. 43:29), Ex 33:19 (the term appears twice, with the meaning: "to be merciful," is translated in Romanian differently: "to pity" and "to endure"), Nm 6:25 (meaning "to pity"), Dt 7:2, 28:50 (with the meanings: "to show mercy"). Only in Gn 42:21 and Dt 3:23, where the verb means "to implore," the Romanian translation opts for "to pray."

חָלָה – the verb has 76 occurrences in the Old Testament but only three occurrences in the Pentateuch: Gn 48:1 (in the pale form, the verb has the meaning: "to be sick"), Ex 32:11 (in the piel form, the verb has the meaning: "to pray") and Dt 29:22 (in the form piel, the verb has the meaning: "to send").

Note that, in the Pentateuch, out of eight occupations, in seven, the verb is in the verb form hitpael, expressing a reflexive action, "back to the subject," but to make "someone else intervene or mediate for one's case." This is what man does through prayer,

"We ask God to intervene when we can do nothing more" (Watson 2018, 91), after the model after which Abraham also mediated for Abimelech.

Only in these two verses of chapter XX is the Hebrew verb פָּלַל translated by the Septuagint as *προσεύχομα*.

This is the only occurrence in the Pentateuch where the Masoretic Text uses the verb in the piel form, which expresses an intensive (insistent, repeated) action in the active diathesis. The meaning of the verb is: "to believe" (this is how Archbishop Ananias also put it), "to think," and "to wait." The Septuagint opts for a loose translation of this verse, and instead of the Hebrew verb פָּלַל, the verb στερεοω is used, "to strengthen."

Of the other six occurrences of the Masoretic Text, in five cases (except Gn 48:11), the Septuagint opts for εὔχομαι.

Etymologically, the term would mean "the danger of the ancestress" (Usca 2008, 220).

The fact that Abimelech himself relates the content of the dream to the servants was not common in those places and times; usually, the servants were informed by the master through messengers. The rabbis believe that Abimelech's act of gathering all the servants and speaking to them "in their hearing" (Gn 20:8), i.e. face to face, terrified the servants terribly (Chumash 2008, 119). They became even more frightened because they believed that the angels who destroyed Sodom had now come to destroy the city of Gherar (*Midrash Rabbah Genesis* I 1961, 456).

Some historians believe that the Philistines could not possibly have lived there at that time "since this population occupied the southwestern coasts of Palestine only in the 13th century" (Monumenta Linguae Dacoromanorum 2004, 348) BC, but others indicate that "isolated groups of Philistines had entered the area many centuries before" (Usca 2008, 220).

It is possible that Abimelech is not a proper name but merely "a generic name given to Philistine kings" (Bondalici 2005, 17), like the titles Pharaoh in the Egyptians, Caesar in the Romans, or Shah in the Persians (Smith's Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible 1901, 4).

"God's standards of purity in marriage are high and unchanging ... To take another man's wife is a mortal sin in God's moral code." (Phillips 1992, 200-201)

The allegorical interpretation, a "decent and honorable" one, "lifts up" the "actions of the fathers" and preaches the words of the Lord, "uncorrupting them with inappropriate, Jewish stories." We have no gain if we read that the great patriarch "not only lied to ... Abimelech but also endangered his wife's modesty" and that she was "exposed to defilement, with her husband's assent." This is what "friends of the letter, not of the spirit" believe. Christians must unite "the spiritual with the spiritual" in order to become "spiritual in deed" (Origen 2006, 265).

Regarding how Abraham and Sarra might have had a partnership relationship, whereby the wife was known in those times as a "sister-wife," we can find similarities with the Hurite society, where the husband could adopt his wife as his sister and give her special status, as she was treated as a blood relative by the husband's family (Sarna 1970, 103). It is argued that Abraham asks Sarra to accept this special status, the legality of which would be recognized by both the Egyptians and the Gherarites and thus "could not harm the couple." "As knowledge of this custom faded," the episode is considered "a lie of the patriarchs" (Skulski 2012, 90).

Abraham is called a "thankful servant" because he "endured all things with ease" and "in all that he did he showed his gratitude to his Master," and though "so many dangers surrounded him and fell into so many trials [...] he remained steadfast as a diamond; he showed his love for God unceasingly, and none of the obstacles hindered him." St. John Chrysostom declares admiringly, "Look [...] what a trial came upon him in Gerar, and marvel at the strength of righteous virtue! He has endured what no one can endure, what no one wants to hear. He was not displeased, nor did he ask the Master for an account [...] he did not question the Master's deeds and decisions but received everything in silence and with much gratitude." It was not easy for him "by right" to endure a "storm of thoughts", to see his "woman" taken into the harem, but "he suffered in silence, knowing that God would not overlook him, but would quickly come to his aid" (John Chrysostom 1989, 128-130).

"What disbelief [...] How dishonest [...] That a saint of God could stoop to such subterfuge is almost unbelievable. That Abraham could repeatedly stoop to this dishonesty was almost inexcusable [...] what a disgrace! What cowardice." A "terrible" cowardice, like that which "drove" the apostle Peter to deny Christ, made Abraham "deny his wife." "Who would have thought that so great and noble a man [...], the friend of God, would be so unworthy and contemptible?!" (Phillips 1992, 203-204).

The barrenness with which Abimelech's harem was struck is the death of which God speaks (Usca 2008, 224).

To explain how Abimelech desired a 90-year-old woman, it is believed that Sarra had already impregnated Isaac, and the seed she received rejuvenated her (Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 166). God resurrects "Sarra's youth to prepare her for her future role as a mother." (Phillips 1992, 199)

According to Jewish legend, Abimelech fell asleep "towards evening, before retiring, while still seated on his throne." The king "fell into a sleep [...] until morning, and in a dream, he saw an angel of the Lord raising his sword to strike him dead." (Ginzberg 2003, 216)

Although we don't know what Abraham said when he prayed for Abimelech, some have tried to imagine, "... Please have mercy on Abimelech and all his house! I failed to show him what You are really like. Show him, Lord." (Phillips 1992, 206)

The expression "fear of God" (Gn 20:11) יִרְאַ֥ת אֱלֹהִ֖ים – pietas – *θεοσέβεια* (term used in the Pentateuch only now, the rest of the time the expression: *φόβος θεοῦ*) refers to respect for God, from which respect for one's fellow men follows (Septuagint 2004, 98).

מֶ֚לֶךְ עוֹזֵ֣ר וּמוֹשִׁ֔יעַ וּמָגֵ֖ן: בָּר֣וּךְ אַתָּ֔ה יְיָ֖ מָגֵ֥ן אַבְרָהָֽם Cf. Prayers for the Day of Atonement 5709-1949, 34

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