

Marrying Your Sister

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Marriage or Cohabitation with a Sister Denounced (Lev. 20:17; Dt. 27:22).

Abraham Married His Sister and God Blessed the Union (Gen. 17:16; 20:11-12).

Abram, who later became known as Abraham, lived in the city of Ur prior to being called by Almighty God (Gen. 11:31; cf. Jn. 6:44, 65). As a resident of Ur, Abram would have been immersed in religious practices that were contrary to the word of God. Therefore Abram's marriage to Sarai, who later became known as Sarah, was not blessed by God. Instead, it was a marriage between two people who did not know the law and commandments of God. It was only after being told to leave Ur that Abram and Sarai began learning about God's way of living, including the prescribed method of worshipping Him,

Ur was a theocratic city-state where the moon-god deity was king as well as god, and the entire activity of the city, commercial, social as well as religious, revolved around the cult. Terah (Abram's father) was very likely a devotee of the moon deity (cf. Jos. 24:2). Abram left the city doubtless when it was at the height of its commercial prosperity (Unger's Bible Handbook; p. 61; published by Moody Press – 1976).

The city of Ur was to Abram what Egypt was to Moses. Both men had to leave their place of birth and go to a different location in order to unlearn the pagan practices of their native countries (Gen. 18:19; cf. Ex. 2:15; Ac. 7:29-30; cf. study: Pagan Practices). When Abram learned more about God's way of living and proved faithful to it, his name was changed to reflect this transformation in character. It was at this point that God could bless Abraham and Sarah, and not before. Therefore, God's blessing had nothing to do with Abram's marriage to Sarai. Instead, God only began blessing them as they started to change and become more obedient to Him. It is important to note that this did not occur until much later in their lives,

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God (Heb. El Shaddai); walk before Me and be **blameless** (SHD 8549; i.e. do not sin willfully).² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' (Gen. 17:1-2; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations (Gen. 17:5; cf. 1Chr. 1:27).

The same principle of changing a person's name to reflect a change in their attitude toward God applies to everyone who repents of sin and begins living a new life of

obedience to God's law and commandments. Eventually these individuals will also be given a new name that reflects their change in attitude,

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes (sin; cf. Rev. 2:26) I (Christ) will give some of the hidden manna (i.e. wisdom associated with correctly understanding the word of God; cf. Mt. 4:4) to eat. And I will give him a white stone (i.e. wisdom associated with the Urim and Thummin stones; cf. Ex. 28:30; 1Sam. 28:6; Ezr. 2:63; Neh. 7:65), and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it (Rev. 2:17; cf. 3:12; Isa. 62:2).

Prior to Abram and Sarai's change, they were not blessed with any children of their own. Instead, Sarah decided to have children through a surrogate named Hagar (Gen. 16:2-3) and the result was not very positive,

So he (Abram) went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress (Sarai) became despised in her eyes.⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, 'My wrong (the wrong done to me) be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me (Gen. 16:5; Ed. notes in parentheses).

At this point in their lives, Abram and Sarai were still learning things the hard way having not fully embraced God's way of living. We can all relate to this way of learning life's lessons. Thankfully God is patient and continues to work with all His children until they reach the point of trusting Him and desiring to obey His every word. Likewise, it was at the critical juncture, when they fully trusted God, that He began blessing Abraham and Sarah. His first blessing was also a miracle because Sarah was to have her first child at the age of ninety,

Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah (princess) shall be her name.¹⁶ And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.'¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old bear a child?' (Gen.17:15-17; Ed. note in parenthesis).

If Abraham had his whole life to live over and understood God's law and commandments from his youth, it is highly unlikely he would have married his half-sister Sarai (Gen. 20:12; cf. Prov. 22:6),

If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and sees her nakedness (i.e. has a sexual relationship) and she sees his nakedness, it is a wicked thing. And they shall be cut off (put to death) in the sight of their people (public execution). He has uncovered his sister's nakedness. He shall bear his guilt (iniquity – sin) (Lev. 20:17; cf. Dt. 27:22; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Some will argue that the law mentioned above was not given until the time of Moses and therefore Abraham would not have known about it. This reasoning is incorrect based on a number of scriptural examples. Jesus Christ has been teaching those who are called out of this present evil age (Gal. 1:4; cf. Jn. 6:44, 65) since the time of

Adam's creation (see study: Who Did the Early Church Think Jesus Christ Was Prior to His Birth As a Man?),

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

It would be reasonable to say that Abraham did not know it was against God's law to marry his half-sister prior to leaving the city of Ur. However, at some point after leaving Ur the Angel of the Lord, who became Jesus Christ, would have taught Abraham that his marriage to Sarah was against God's law. Whenever this occurred, Abraham would have repented and then been forgiven. Consequently, stating that Almighty God blessed Abraham's marriage to his half-sister is twisting Holy Scripture and those who engage in this exercise will give an account in the future (cf. 2Pet. 3:16, Mt. 12:36-37). Instead, God began blessing Abraham and Sarah progressively as their trust in Him grew, and this principle applies to everyone who responds as they did. However, it is important to bear in mind that God's blessings cannot always be measured in physical terms. The greatest blessing that God can bestow on mankind is a correct understanding of His word, which includes His plan of reconciling every sinner to Himself (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20; 2Pet. 3:9).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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