



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Biblical Design of Gender, Part 10”

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Informed. Insightful. Intelligent.



The Biblical Design of Gender, Part 10

Genesis 21:5-10

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6 And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.”

7 She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

10 Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.”

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Our takeaway point in this series on the Biblical Design of Gender is that

God has designed man as the cooperative coalition of husband and wife so that man can successfully achieve the objective that God has given us to exercise dominion over the earth, developing wisdom and knowledge in preparation for further responsibility in our eternal life.

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham decided to leave Canaan and journey into the Palestine. He settled in a town named Gerar, which was part of the Philistine territory, with his entourage and his pregnant ninety-year-old wife. Now, before we go farther, let me say that Abraham was a warrior, and had been the protector of Sodom and Gomorrah before they were destroyed, which may have been one of the reasons that God consulted with Abraham before destroying them. **Genesis 14:8-16** tells us:

8 And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim



9 against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.

10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains.

11 Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way.

12 They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram.

14 Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.

When Abraham moved to Gerar, Abimelech, the king of Gerar came to meet this warlord that had defeated the four kings and had moved into his territory. At their meeting, the king became fascinated by the unusual case of Sarah, who was an uncharacteristically beautiful pregnant ninety-year-old woman. Powerful men are generally attracted to beauty, and Abimelech was no exception. The most outwardly attractive parts of women are those that give evidence to their fertility, and Sarah, at this point in her life, was a stunning specimen of reproduction. Although Abimelech had a large harem, Abimelech was a collector and collectors go after rare objects. And Abimelech got the green light from Abraham to go after Sarah. **Genesis 20:2** says:

2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

I'm still trying to figure this out. God told Abraham that Sarah was going to have his child of the promise, Sarah is pregnant with the child, so Abraham decides to move and once again, give his wife to a foreign king. I don't get it.

But although Abraham gave Sarah up, God did not. **Genesis 20:3-7** records:

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."

4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?"



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5 Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”

6 And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

7 Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”

So God defended Sarah’s honor with Abimelech directly. Abimelech pled ignorance of Sarah’s marital status and asked for a chance to repair his error, and God gave it to him. But Abimelech’s beef is not with God, but with Abraham. When Abimelech asked Abraham why Abraham deceived him about Sarah, Abraham responded with the same lame lie that he used on the Pharaoh about being afraid of being killed. But Abraham was a warlord, and his army was good enough to defeat four kings at once. It’s doubtful that Abraham was really so afraid of a fight with Abimelech that he would give up his wife.

I think that Abraham had a different motivation. **Genesis 20:14-16** says:

14 Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him.

15 And Abimelech said, “See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”

16 Then to Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody.” Thus she was rebuked.

Listen to an earlier passage of Scripture that is somewhat similar to this one. **Genesis 12:14-19, 13:1-2** says:

14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful.

15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house.

16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

17 But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.

18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?

19 Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.”

1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South.

2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.



Abraham took the riches of Egypt from that land, and then, through Abimelech, added to them the riches of Philistia. Sheep, oxen, male and female servants and a thousand pieces of silver in addition to that which Abraham already had gave Abraham a nice big bank account. Neither the Pharaoh nor Abimelech nor Abraham challenged each other militarily, but the Pharaoh and Abimelech ended up giving Abraham big money. The only pattern I can see and the only conclusion to which I can come is that Abraham intentionally used Sarah's beauty and fertility to get rich, and Sarah went along with the program. And that observation brings us to God's admonition to wives based upon the conduct of Sarah, as **1Peter 3:1-6** tells us:

1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—

4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Abraham asked Sarah to tell two different kings that she was his sister rather than his wife so that they could take her into their harems. And Sarah did it. That, my friend, is some serious submission. But according to **1Peter 3**, Sarah won her husband without a word by being submissive. I don't think that Sarah was being submissive because she thought going to various harems was necessarily good for her, but, as verse five of **1Peter 3** tells us, Sarah was submissive because she was trusting in God.

You see, neither men nor women know the outcome of any plan that they decide to put into motion. But **Proverbs 16:9** tells us:

9 A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

We all have the opportunity to do that which we think will be the most effective, but God instructed Sarah to be submissive to Abraham and follow his lead. So Sarah decided to trust God to guide Abraham. She certainly had her own opinions and plans for Abraham just as he had plans for her, but ultimately, she called Abraham lord and had confidence in his relationship with God.

Now, **2Corinthians 6:14-16** tells us:

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?



15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

In order for a woman to have confidence that submission to her husband is intelligent, she must be sure that her husband is a believer in Jesus Christ.

2Corinthians 6 tells us that God is dwelling with believers and walking among us, and as **Proverbs 16:9** tells us, the Lord is directing the steps of those that believe in Him. Although we may not understand the direction of the Lord, we need to follow Him.

You may remember an incident in the Garden of Gethsemane. God directed Jesus Christ to give Himself to the Jews, which looked like a poor decision to the disciples. Peter so disagreed with the decision that he started a knife fight to protect Jesus from the consequences of it. Ultimately, however, Jesus Christ's decision to be submissive to God caused us all to be saved from the penalty of sin, so I guess it worked out pretty well.

So Sarah submits to Abraham, enters Abimelech's harem, is protected from harm by God and comes out to the good. And after the drama with Abimelech is over, Sarah completes her gestation period, and Isaac is born. Our text, **Genesis 21:5-8** tells us:

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

6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me."

7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

It is a great day for Sarah. After suffering with a lack of fulfillment for years, she finally had the experience of bringing a son into the world. When a child nurses at his mother's breast, the oxytocin flows and a special bond is formed between them. I read a book written by a woman who had no desire to have children until she reached the age of 35 years of age. During her younger years, she was a high academic achiever and became a college professor, and enjoyed her career. But she woke up one morning with the unbidden desire to have a child. She didn't know where the desire came from, but she knew she had it, although she did not want to give up her career. So she asked her husband whether or not he wanted to be a father, and he enthusiastically replied in the affirmative.

"Well, if we do this, I'm not giving up my career", she said. "I'm not becoming a nanny for a baby. And we'll have to split the child care



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responsibilities right down the middle. For every diaper that I change, you'll have to change one. This is either going to be a 50/50 deal, or I'm not doing it."

Her husband agreed, they became pregnant and she had a baby boy. She did not intend to breast feed the baby, but somehow that information did not get to the nurses that were attending to the child after the birth, so they brought the baby to her so that she could nurse him. At first she protested, but the nurse told her that it would take them some time to prepare a formula appropriate for the baby and he was hungry. "Just try it. It's the most natural thing in the world", said the nurse.

So the woman complied, and when she looked into her sons' eyes as he drew nourishment from her body, a feeling came over her that she had never experienced before. She loved her husband, but the way this little boy made her feel as he suckled at her breast was more intense than any feeling that she had ever had. She and this little boy were bonded by the breastfeeding experience, and she realized that she wanted to take care of this little life more than anything. She ended up giving up her teaching career to stay home to take care of her baby.

An entire generation and a half of women have been beguiled by the suggestion that that which they have to give their child is easily replaced by a nanny, babysitter, or day-care worker. But the bond between mother and child is crucial in shaping the child's psyche. When an infant has his mother available to constantly comfort him and take care of his needs, he develops confidence in his ability to thrive in his environment because of that relationship. But infants are not verbal, and when they are neglected, they cannot register an intellectual protest; all they can do is cry. When their cries do not elicit a response, they eventually become exhausted and give up, and develop the perspective that the world is a neglectful place. Little psyches are being misshaped in day-care centers around the country, because the children in them are too young to develop properly in an institutionalized setting. Formal education starts with a half-day away from mom at five years of age because that is that age in which the psyche of the child has developed sufficiently to be away from the security of his mother. When a child has to leave the care of his mother earlier than five years of age, he is generally not psychologically ready for the experience. If the amount of care that he receives is adequate to keep him alive he will be able to survive the experience, but he will not develop the optimum emotional stability that he might otherwise have.

In the apocryphal book of 2Maccabees, chapter 7 verse 7 tells us that the nursing period for Hebrew mothers is generally about three years. So Sarah probably followed the Hebrew norm, and nursed Isaac for three years and then weaned him off the breast, after which time Abraham made a great feast for him. But **Genesis 21:9** tells us:



9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

Let's recap this situation. Before Ishmael was born, Abraham's heir was Eliezer of Damascus, his chief servant. Sarah offered Abraham her maid Hagar as a surrogate mother so that Abraham could father a child to be his heir. So Abraham took Sarah up on her offer of Hagar, and while Hagar was pregnant, Hagar and Sarah fell out. The oxytocin response in Hagar flowed for Abraham when they had marital relations and she became possessive of him. Hagar imagined that she would be closer to Abraham than was Sarah, because she was the mother of Abraham's child, but Hagar found out that men do not have the same hormonal bonding process as do women. Men bond to women by a decision to do so, and Abraham had already decided to bond to Sarah. Without hesitation, Abraham sacrificed the feelings of Hagar for those of Sarah, the woman that he loved and had married. Abraham put Hagar under Sarah's rule, and Hagar found out that she had to be submissive to her mistress to stay in the camp.

So Hagar bore Ishmael for Abraham, and remained Sarah's maid, while her son was Abraham's heir. Sarah, Hagar and Abraham made for a strange love triangle, but they held it together for Ishmael's sake. When God came down to tell Abraham and Sarah that Isaac was going to be born, Abraham pleaded with God to just accept Ishmael as his heir, because just as Abraham was bonded to Sarah as his wife, Abraham was bonded to Ishmael as his son. The Bible records the event of God instituting the covenant of circumcision with Abraham, in **Genesis 17:23-25**:

23 So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him.

24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Every male in the camp was circumcised, but only Ishmael is named. Ishmael is Abraham's son of the flesh. The bond between Abraham and Ishmael was strong, as Abraham was preparing Ishmael to take over the responsibility of being the chief of the camp. Unfortunately, Ishmael never nursed at Sarah's breast, and the bond between Ishmael and Sarah did not develop, because of the tension between Ishmael's mother and Sarah.

Sarah did not become hostile to Ishmael until the birth of Isaac, the child of the promise with whom Sarah did bond. Three years of breastfeeding made Isaac's mother very protective. She was even akin to a mother bear, as she protected Isaac. Ishmael was the odd man out. He had been the only son of the



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chief. Abraham was teaching and mentoring him, but Isaac became Ishmael's competition. Isaac was only three, and was still under his mother's jurisdiction since he was depending on her for sustenance, but Ishmael could see his dad's attention turning toward his little half-brother and away from him.

The situation came to a head when Abraham made a big fuss over the fact that Isaac was eating solid food and was no longer on the breast. At the feast, Ishmael said, "What's the big deal? So now he can eat cereal. Can he count, or throw a spear, or wield a sword? I can. What's the big deal about a baby that is just learning how to eat?"

That was a mistake. Ever since Isaac took the breast and those hormones flowed through her body, Sarah was waiting for a reason to get rid of Ishmael, who would be a rival to Isaac. The fact that Abraham and Ishmael were bonded was irrelevant to Sarah; Isaac was her child and was to be the next chief of the tribe. Suddenly, Sarah didn't like either Hagar or Ishmael very much any more, and **Genesis 21:10** tells us:

10 Therefore [Sarah] said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."

The verse is written in a way that shows you the intensity of Sarah. The phrase, "this bondwoman and her son" relegated both Hagar and Ishmael to the status of a slave. Sarah could have named the bondwoman and her son, just as the Scripture named Ishmael during the episode of circumcision, but Sarah only named Isaac, who, in her mind, was Abraham's only heir. Sarah regretted the day that she suggested that Abraham father a child by Hagar since the day that Hagar first gave her a problem, and Sarah has been waiting for a chance to get this woman out of their lives.

In **Matthew 19:5-6**, Jesus tells us:

5 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

It is wise to never come between a man and his wife, or a woman and her husband. God has made them one flesh, and they are not to be separated. Hagar was not at fault; she had no choice but to submit to the command of her mistress to bear a child by her mistress' husband, but the fact that Hagar had no choice other than coming between Sarah and Abraham did not shield Hagar from the consequences of Sarah's wrath.

Abraham exercised his plan to give Sarah to Abimelech and the Pharaoh, and God blessed and increased his situation. Abraham's plan looked shaky, but it worked out well. Sarah exercised her plan to give Hagar to Abraham, and God increased her situation, but the increase was not a blessing. Sarah's plan did not



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work out so well. But the same Bible that tells wives to submit to their husbands also tells husbands to love their wives, and this case is no exception.

Men can't always do that which we want to do or even that which we think is best, especially when it pertains to our wives, because we have to understand that our wives feel a certain way and they may not be able to overcome their feelings. God tells us to only have one wife and have marital relations with only her because of the feelings that He has designed into women and the possessiveness that they feel for those with whom they have intimate contact. And we should follow God's instruction in this matter. Some things are to be avoided, because, when done, they cannot be fixed. God knew, from the day that Abraham lay with Hagar, that this day was coming.

So after Sarah demanded that Abraham get rid of Hagar and Ishmael, **Genesis 21:11-12** records:

11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.

Abraham was bonded with Ishmael, but men are bonded volitionally because men have to make objective decisions for the best good of their organization. God allowed Abraham to bond with Ishmael so that Abraham could practice feeling the emotion of having to give up that which he loved, because in our next episode, Abraham's will and emotions will be put to the test. But even as God commands Abraham to let Ishmael go, God comforts Abraham by promising him that He will make provision for Ishmael, just as He has made provisions for Abraham himself. **Genesis 21:13-14** records

13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

Ephesians 5:25 tells us:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Christ gave His very life for the Church out on the Hill called Calvary. He suffered, bled and died that the sins of those in the Church might be forgiven. So, brothers, let us always remember to keep our wives' feelings uppermost in our minds as we make those decisions that we have to make, and let us sacrifice ourselves, even as Jesus did, and rise every morning thinking of how we can give ourselves for our wives, to make our wives glad to be alive, and glad to be married to us.



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