

# FEED MY SHEEP

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Issue #98

January 2007

## Did Abram and Sarai Commit Incest?

Since our studies in the life of David have carried us well into his middle years now, we have seen in recent issues the dreadful consequences of David's sins of adultery and murder. We find rape, incest and murder within David's own family, among his sons and daughters. As we saw that David's son, Amnon, incestuously raped his half-sister, Tamar; we raised the question about the case of Abraham. Since the Bible says that he married his half-sister, was that not incest as well?

To recapitulate, in Genesis 12 Abraham, then still known as Abram, went down to Egypt and was fearful that Pharaoh would kill him and take the gorgeous Sarai for his harem. So he told Pharaoh she was his sister so he himself would not be killed. Later, Abram pulled the same stunt with Abimelech, king of Gerar. When God warned Abimelech in a dream not to touch Sarai, he was furious with Abram and demanded an explanation. Abram replied:

**Genesis 20:12 And yet indeed *she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.***

Is this not incest according to Leviticus 20:17?

**Leviticus 20:17 And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity.**

To "see his/her nakedness" is a Hebrew euphe-

mism for having sexual relations. How is it that this incident is never mentioned by God anywhere in His Word as being a place where Abraham transgressed the law? Of course, many ministers would respond by saying that "well, the law was not in effect yet, because it didn't come into effect until God gave it to Moses on Mt. Sinai about 500 years later." To which we would rebut that such is not the case. Moses was merely codifying what was already in existence since Adam. In fact, God specifically tells us this in ...

**Genesis 26:5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.**

So there you have it. Was Abram committing incest? If so, why was he not condemned for it? If he was not committing incest, how do you show that he wasn't? We asked our readers to mail us their solution to this dilemma. I appreciate all the responses and the considerable thought that was put into it. We obviously don't have space to publish all of them, but we will share excerpts from some of them. First, consider what Paul stated in...

**Romans 5: 13 (For until the law [covenant] sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

**14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.**

Does that apply in any way to Abraham and Sarai's situation? In other words, did they in fact sin

in marrying, but the sin was not imputed to them? One reader seems to imply that in his proffered solution. Richard from Minnesota wrote:

Did Abraham commit incest when he married his half-sister, Sarah? Gen. 20:12. God was preparing to give us a pattern of two covenants. They started as the Tree of Life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Now, He planned to produce them through two women, Sarah and Hagar. Sarah is grace, Hagar is law. God was in Abraham, choosing a bride, Sarah, who would be a pattern of the Bride of Jesus Christ in our day. As Abraham and Sarah had the same father; so Jesus and His Bride have the same Father.

The first Adam's bride, the rib, came out of his own body. The last Adam's Bride will come out of His own body also. We are the rib, and the church is the body of Christ. The covenant of grace, in Sarah, is unconditional, and it sets us free from the law of sin and death, Rom. 8:2. The law of incest has no power over those who walk in the covenant of grace.

God, moving through Abraham, chose a woman, Sarah, who would accurately represent us in our sin and weaknesses. She had a flawed background and so do we. We are totally unworthy to be a Bride for the Son of God. Through the covenant of grace, Sarah, God's unconditional love compelled Him to accept her. That unconditional covenant also compels God to receive us, as prodigal sons, and restore everything we've wasted, and dress us in the wedding garments, His righteousness.

Here is a principle that we need to remember. The covenant of the law says: perfection produces righteousness. The covenant of grace says: righteousness produces perfection.

Richard's letter deals with an exposition of the types and shadows, rather than directly to the question of whether or not incest was committed. We are in general agreement on the types and shadows. However, where he writes, "The law of incest has no power over those who walk in the covenant of grace," we must raise our hand. Because it sounds like it gives license to commit incest. In our days, New Testament times, because we are "under grace and not under the law," that does not give license for any believer to disobey any of God's law, including incest. Nor did Abram have license to commit incest. Paul was very

careful when he wrote Romans 8:13 (see page 1), about sin not being imputed, to include the fact in the very next verse, that "nevertheless death reigned..." In other words, Paul is not saying that God winked at sin before Moses. We know that from many cases, the Flood being the most prominent example. God didn't wink there; He wiped the slate clean because of sin!

Turning back to the central question of incest between Abram and Sarai, some will make the argument about the gene pool being relatively clean at that time, and so if two close relatives married, the dangers of magnifying a bad genetic quality would be relatively minimal. That *may* be true—no one can say for sure—but in making that argument, one is assuming that the genetic purity is the only reason for God's prohibition against incest. In other words, those who make this argument are saying that it was okay at that time because there was no danger of genetic contamination being magnified in their offspring. I am playing devil's advocate here when I ask, how do we know that the genetic defects is the *only* reason why God gave the law prohibiting incest?

A friend from Georgia wrote (with pertinent genealogy chart attached to her letter):

Terah took Abram, Lot and Sarai with him when he left Ur of Chaldees (Gen. 11:31). Could Sarai have been Iscah, the sister of Lot, whose father had died? Milcah had married Nahor. I cannot believe Terah would take Lot and leave the other daughter. I have never believed Abram married his half-sister. It seems there were no words for grandfather or grandmother, uncle, aunts, nephew, niece, etc.

It seems to me that grandfathers were called fathers, uncles were called brothers. The women were called mothers or sisters. It's possible that Abraham's wife was his niece, not his half-sister. Somewhere in my study years ago, I got the idea that Sarai and Lot were brother and sister. I'm very interested in how you see it. Waiting to see the correct interpretation.—Gladys, Georgia

A few comments on Gladys' letter: She is correct in that there are no occurrences in the Hebrew Old Testament of any word translated "grandfather" or "grandmother." While "nephew" appears twice (Job 18:19; Isaiah 14:22), the Hebrew word actually means

progeny, posterity or offspring. The term “uncle’s son” is found (Lev. 25:49), so there was a term for a nephew. A niece could have been designated in the same manner. The word “niece” itself is not found in the OT. The word “uncle” appears 10 times in the OT, but “aunt” appears only once, in Lev. 18:14 curiously enough, in the laws governing permissible sexual relationships.

As for the possibility that Sarai was Abram’s niece, not his half-sister, we believe that is correct. It is the solution to our dilemma, as we shall see shortly. A man (uncle) marrying his niece is permissible according to our understanding of the laws governing sexual relations in Leviticus 18. The reverse, however, (an aunt marrying her nephew) is forbidden (Lev. 18:12, 13).

As we have found so many times in our OT studies, the book of Jasher clarifies and/or resolves many confusing passages. [Beware: there are at least two versions of *Jasher* out there. We compared them in FMS #22 & 23 (*Is There a Genuine Book of Jasher? Parts 1 & 2*, which are available at our website [www.stonekingdom.org](http://www.stonekingdom.org) or from our offices via postal service.) We carry the version which, while not to be classified with the Bible as “inspired and inerrant,” is very reliable for dilemmas such as we are discussing here. (*The Book of Jasher*, 256 pages, \$15 ppd.) A couple respondents to this puzzle did consult *Jasher*, and we quote Tom from Texas. He also included a hand-drawn genealogy chart. We incorporated it as part of our larger one on page 4:

While Abram’s mother is listed as Amthelo, there is no mention of who the mother of Haran or Nahor is. As Terah was 70 years old when Abram is born, she may have been a younger/second wife. Terah was 38 years old when he begat Haran and Nahor (Jasher 7:22) but was 70 years old when he begets Abram (Jasher 7:51).

I cannot find any info on who Haran was married to but he has 3 children before he dies (killed by Nimrod, according to Jasher, in the same test as Abram endures). Abram may be half-brother to Haran and Nahor. The brothers of Haran take on his children as their responsibility, the daughters as wives, and Lot as a sort of stepson to Abram. Also, Hebrew does not distinguish generational peculiarities such as [between]

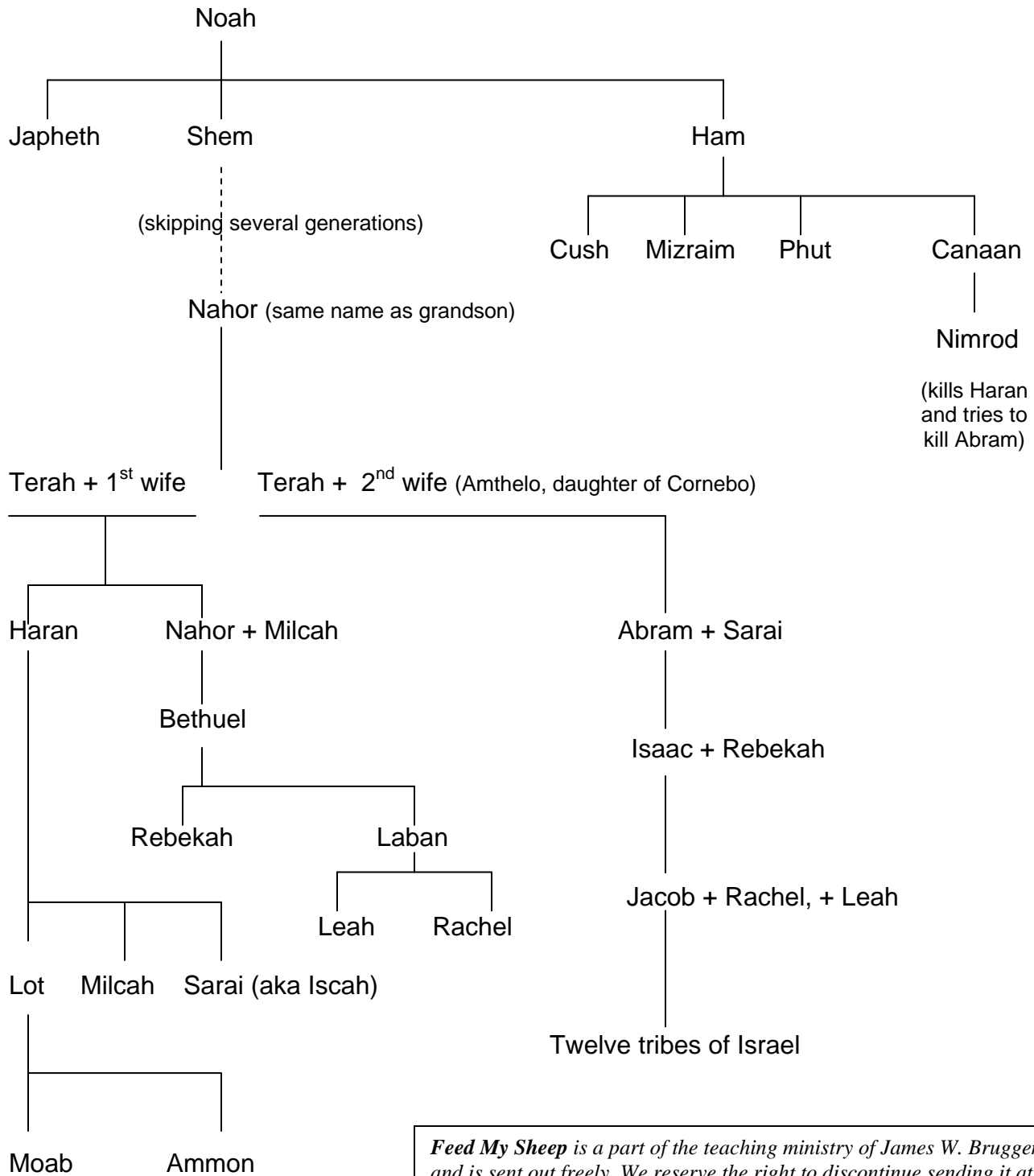
son, grandson, great-grandson. Descent through the male line is accurately referred to as father and son even though there may be many gaps.

Sarai’s “father” is Terah—by simply skipping Haran and jumping to “grandpa.” This is not grammatically incorrect in the Hebrew, as I understand it. [Tom is correct here.] Therefore, Abram did not lie when he said Sarai and he had the same father (paternal line), but not the same mother. More accurately, he was Sarai’s uncle, and could therefore legally and lawfully marry her. As the book of Jasher tells the story of Haran’s ordeal, [a fate] which he shares with Abram at the hands of Nimrod, Haran dies because of his unbelief. Yet Abram is saved by/through fire. Since there was no welfare system, it was a family member’s responsibility to look after their relations, but this also kept their bloodline/genealogy pure as a by-product. —Tom, Texas

Thanks, Tom—and to all who responded. Some of you have hit on the key pieces of the puzzle. The Bible is clear that after the Flood, the Shem line was chosen to possess the Dominion mandate. The descendants of Noah’s son, Shem, would be the line with whom God would establish the Covenant. The sons are traced down to Terah, the father of Abram. See chart, next page. Terah is seldom mentioned in sermons or Bible studies, but his importance should not be overlooked. Bible students often refer to “the fathers,” meaning Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed, Abram, son of Terah, fathered the male line of the covenant people. But as a study of this monograph and the accompanying genealogical chart shows, Terah’s other sons, *Haran and Nahor, provided the female line*. Aside from these women who became mothers in the line of the covenant people (Sarai, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah), nothing more is heard in the Bible of the descendants of Abram’s brothers, Haran and Nahor. We can assume that Rachel and Leah’s handmaids were from the stock of Nahor as well.

In the next two generations following Abraham, we find Isaac marrying Rebekah, his second cousin (Gen. 24:45-48), and Jacob marrying Rachel and Leah, his first cousins (Gen. 29:10). Again, by God’s law these are not forbidden marriages. We hope this discussion has clarified any confusion regarding Abram and Sarai. It was not incest.

## **The Chosen Family: Noah through Terah to the 12 Patriarchs**



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