

INOCULATIONS

JUST BACK FROM THE VET, the thoughts linger on annual vaccinations. It was time for our Little Bit's annual checkup and jabs—all of which she suffered stoically, if noisily. In humans, as well, it is very often a good thing to get inoculated against such common meanies as the flu virus that is so rampant this year.

But humans can also benefit from vaccinations of another sort. During my annual reading through the Bible I recently revisited the story of Abraham—who had this really bizarre habit of telling others that Sarah was not his wife, but his *sister*, when traveling to other sovereign lands.

Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

Genesis 20:1-2

And each time Abraham did this, God had to come in and clean up after him.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married."

Genesis 20:3

So the heathen king, Abimelech, apparently displaying more trust in God than His designated patriarch, immediately returned Sarah to her husband untouched.

This, of course, was not the first time Abraham had done this—the first being at an earlier visit to Egypt—nor was it the first time he had not trusted in the sovereign will and timing of Jehovah-Adonai. When his wife Sarah grew impatient waiting for the Lord's timing for a son, Abram relented and slept with her maid, Hagar, to produce an heir. But it was not the heir of the Lord's choosing. He declared that the offspring, Ishmael,

"...will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers."

Genesis 16:12

In fact to this day the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs, are a

militant thorn in the side of Israel, doing everything they possibly can to rid the world of every last Jew—all because Abraham would not wait for the Lord.



vac·cine (vak-seen' or, esp. British, vak'-seen, -sin) *n.* [L. vaccinus < vacca, a cow] any preparation used as a preventive inoculation to confer immunity against a specific disease, usually employing an innocuous form of the disease agent, as killed or weakened bacteria or viruses, to stimulate antibody production.

The Bible's stories of human failure serve to inoculate us—at least for a while—against making the same mistakes in our own lives. Their "innocuous" forms of the sin disease—made so by their antiquity and, to most of us, alien culture—can vaccinate us against the more harmful contemporary form of the disease.

Sin is ancient; it has dwelt on this earth since just after the

flowering of its first fruit trees. But although it has morphed and adapted over the millennia, some things never change. The deceit and lack of faith in Adam and Abraham is the pattern for the deceit and mistrust we demonstrate today.

Vaccines for the viruses that inflict us today eventually lose their effectiveness. This year's flu cannot be fought with last year's injection, but must be fought with this year's vaccine.

Reading the stories of the people in God's word can be an effective inoculation against our proclivity for the same failings. We learn from their mistakes—perhaps even saving ourselves from committing them in the first place. But once is never enough. We must keep returning to those ancient stories—stories of both failures and triumphs—for our flesh has a short memory for such things.

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:4-6

