

TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Talk Genesis 20:1-18: Abraham and Abimelech

Lesson 43

"And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. 2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

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? 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."

8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

11 And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. 12 But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

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^[a] before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.

17 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; 18 for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife."

Background Notes

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham, in true Bedouin fashion, moved his tents once again. This time he moved away from the area of Hebron, where he had been living. In verse 1 we see that Abraham first traveled south toward Negev and

than turned west and settled in Gerar, on the edge of Philistine territory. That would be in the vicinity of the Gaza strip today. Abimelech, king of Gerar, was one of the early Philistine kings.

In order to protect his own life, Abraham lied about Sarah and said she was his sister. Does that sound familiar? Abraham had done this very same thing back in Genesis 12 when they were in Egypt. Well, the lie didn't work in chapter 12, and it didn't work in chapter 20, either. Once again God protected Sarah's purity. He incapacitated Abimelech and then warned him in a dream.

But God listened to Abimelech's reasoning and told Abimelech: "*Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her*" (v6). It's interesting to note that if Abimelech had proceeded in the relationship with Sarah, even in **ignorance**, it would have been sin. Sin -- not only against Sarah, but sin against God. God's standards are not lowered.

In verse 7 we have the first mention of a "prophet" in the Bible. A prophet, by definition, speaks the word of God to the people, whereas a priest speaks to God on behalf of the people. So Abraham was a prophet of God long before the days of the more well-known prophets, such as Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Abimelech gave Sarah back to Abraham and gave him a huge sum of money to ensure peace. One thousand pieces of silver was a lot of money! The price of a slave, even in later times, was thirty pieces of silver. As a result of Abimelech's action, God healed him and his household: *17"So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. 18For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of **Awifebimelech**, because of Sarah Abraham's wife"* (v17-18).

Abimelech's healing came about as a result of Abraham's prayers. Talk about the grace of God! In spite of Abraham's selfish mistake here, he was still God's spokesman for Abimelech.

Doctrinal Points

1. Mature believers can make selfish mistakes more than once.

Who would have thought that Abraham, a man of faith, would have lied about Sarah, his wife, to protect his own life? This is the man who boldly fought the kings of the east and rescued Lot in Genesis 14. This is the man of faith and intercessory prayer of Genesis 18. And yet Abraham lied about his own wife to protect his life – and he did it more than once! He lied to Pharaoh in Genesis 12; he lied to Abimelech in Genesis 20.

It seems that Abraham and Sarah may have made some kind of pact when they left Ur, that they would tell this lie. Look at verse 13 again: "*When God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.*" So maybe they'd made this mistake more than twice. The fact that Sarah was Abraham's half sister (v20) doesn't make their lie less than a lie – she was his **wife**. There is no such thing as a half lie or a "white lie." A lie is a lie.

The lesson here is that mature believers can make selfish mistakes more than once. The flesh doesn't get any better, the older we get. If you are an older more mature believer, don't think that you are preserved from making selfish mistakes.

I will be shortly be speaking at a conference where most of the people will be older, mature believers, but I can almost see it now. Some of these older believers will be scrambling around, trying to get the best rooms in the lodge, and to get the best seats in the dining room, right? Older, more mature believers make selfish mistakes more than once, because the flesh doesn't get any better the older we get! As we get older, we need to pray that the Lord would preserve us from making selfish choices -- in reference to our spouses, in reference to our children, in reference to job changes, in reference to retirement plans. A selfish mistake can take a active, productive, mature believer right out of the loop of God's blessing. It can happen. Mature believers can make selfish mistakes -- more than once!

2. Mature believers may receive stinging rebukes more than once.

Probably the most stinging rebuke that a Christian can receive is when the Lord uses an unbeliever to rebuke us. It happened to Abraham more than once. Pagan Pharaoh rebuked him in Egypt, Genesis 12, and here Abimelech, a Philistine, had to rebuke him. *"And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?" (v9-10).*

What a rebuke! What a sad testimony! Have you ever been rebuked by an unbeliever? Sometimes God has to use this form of discipline, even with mature believers. Believers can sink lower than unbelievers when they are not walking by faith. Mature believers may receive stinging rebukes more than once.

Practical Applications

1. Let's not blame God for our selfish choices.

Look at the explanation Abraham gave to Abimelech, as to why he had lied to him. *"And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother"' (v13).*

Can you believe it? Abraham was actually trying to shift the blame of his mistake here to God - when **God** made me wander! There are several Hebrew words for wander, and the one that Abraham used here is generally used in a negative way. Abraham was blaming God for **his** mistake, whether he realized it or not. He should have said, "I was wrong, I've sinned." Have you ever blamed God for your mistakes? Let's not blame God for our selfish choices.

A Christian couple we know moved away from a very productive and fruitful ministry because they felt that God wanted them to start a Bible study in an area where there were very large and expensive homes. So they bought a large and expensive home and moved into that area. When things did not work out as they had thought, rather than admit that

buying that home was a selfish choice and a mistake, they tended to blame **God** for not giving them more guidance! As far as we know, this couple never did get back on track. Let's not blame God for our selfish choices.

2. Let's not assume we know an unbeliever's heart.

Look at what Abraham said to Abimelech: *"Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife"(v11)*. Abraham assumed that Abimelech was a pagan, like all the rest of the Canaanites -- but Abraham was wrong! Abraham was not aware that Abimelech did have knowledge of the true God, and did fear God, and had integrity of heart before God (v6). God spoke, and Abimelech obeyed what the Lord told him to do.

We don't know whether Abimelech was a true believer or not, or whether Abimelech became a true believer or not, but his attitude of heart was certainly a lot different than Abraham had assumed. Let's not make the same mistake. Don't assume that all your worldly neighbors and the party-loving people that you work with are pagans. Many of them are wearing masks, and underneath those masks you may find the fear of God and an open heart to the gospel. Let's not assume we know an unbeliever's heart.

Last week I gave a booklet entitled Ultimate Questions to a neighbor who is an unbeliever. I didn't think that he would read this short book because he hadn't read another pamphlet that I previously had given him. Well, was I wrong! He not only read the booklet, but he went to church yesterday! God is at work in this guy's life -- and I had assumed he was totally closed-off to God. Let's not assume we know an unbeliever's heart.