

The Lord Showed Further Sin of Abraham

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the consequences of the choices and sins of Lot even though 2 Peter tells us that he was a righteous man. Abraham was also a righteous man, but he also made some wrong choices. In chapter 13, we saw that he placed his wife in danger to protect himself. Now, in chapter 20, we will see that Abraham repeated that same sin even though God had promised him that Sarah would have a son in the near future.

The Lord had recently promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. The cities in the area of Sodom had been destroyed after that promise. Then, Genesis 20:1-3 says, “And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She *is* my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 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.’” Here, we see that Abraham began to move toward the south and stayed for a period of time in the city of Gerar. This city was located between the cities of Kadesh and Shur. Kadesh was at the south end of the land of Canaan and is also known as Kadesh Barnea. Shur was on the road that leads to Egypt from the land of Canaan. This meant that Gerar was a Philistine city southeast of Gaza.

About twenty-five years earlier, Abraham had gone down into Egypt and told Sarah to say that she was his sister. That resulted in Pharaoh telling Abraham in Genesis 12:18-19, “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? 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.’” Here, we see that Pharaoh had rebuked Abraham for his sin and sent him out of Egypt. Now, we see that Abraham chose to try to deceive Abimelech in the same way. When Abraham said, “She is my sister,” Abimelech decided to take her into his harem and sent someone to get her for him. Here, we see that Abraham again sinned and put Sarah in danger.

However, God chose to protect Sarah even though Abraham had sinned. God spoke to Abimelech in a dream during the night. In the dream, God gave Abimelech a very specific message, as God said, “Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.” Here, we see that God gave Abimelech two choices. Abimelech could return Sarah to Abraham or he would become a dead man. God made it clear that He was going to protect Sarah in spite of what Abraham had said and done. We see that Abraham endangered his wife because of his own sin and caused her to lie to try to protect himself. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” That verse was not yet written, but Abraham was going to be rebuked by Abimelech for his sin.

Genesis 20:4-7 says, “But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, ‘Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 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.’ 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. 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.’” Here, we see that God gave this warning to Abimelech before Abimelech had committed sin with Sarah. As a result, Abimelech asked the Lord in his dream, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?” At that point, Abimelech was still innocent and God was protecting him.

In his dream, Abimelech told God exactly what both Sarah and Abraham had told him. Both of them had lied to him. Abimelech said that he had done what he did with a clear conscience. Infact, Abimelech pointed out two key lessons that we want to teach our children. First, he did what he did in the integrity of his heart. The word translated “integrity” means *in strength or uprightness in heart*. The word is used, in 1 Kings 9:4, where we read, “Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, *and* if you keep My statutes and My judgments.” Proverbs 20:7 adds, “The righteous *man* walks in his integrity; his children *are* blessed after him.” When we walk in integrity in our hearts, that integrity will determine our actions. Abimelech said that he had done this in the innocence of his hands. He acted on the basis of a pure heart.

God immediately assured Abimelech that He knew the integrity of his heart. God said that the very reason He had prevented Abimelech from sinning was due to the fact that He knew the heart of Abimelech. This verse is also a reminder that God looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” After saying He knew the heart of Abimelech, God told him what to do, as God said, “restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live.” Here, God made it clear what to do in order to prevent any judgment. God will always forgive when a person is obedient to Him. God said that He would hear the prayer of Abraham when he prayed for Abimelech because Abraham was a prophet.

In contrast, God will also bring judgment when a person is disobedient, so God told Abimelech what would happen if he did not restore Sarah to Abraham. God told Abimelech that disobedience to His command would bring judgment to Abimelech and to his kingdom. God said, “if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.” This is a reminder of what God told Adam in Genesis 2:16-17, where we read, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Every person either chooses to obey God and come to Him in repentance and faith, or rebel against God and receive consequences on this earth and eternal judgment in the future. Abimelech chose to obey God and protected the physical life of both himself and all of those in his kingdom.

Genesis 20:8-9 shows Abimelech’s obedience as we read, “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. 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.’” We see that Abimelech acted quickly in his obedience to God. He got up early in the morning and called all of his servants together. Then, he told them

about the dream and everything that God had said. When the men heard what God had said to Abimelech, they were all filled with fear.

There are two key kinds of fear related to this statement. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” The sorrow of the world is shown by the fact that people are sorry when they get caught and they fear the consequences. In contrast, godly sorrow is true repentance for the sin of unbelief and leads to salvation. These verses do not tell us which kind of repentance each of these men experienced. Some of the men may have had a godly fear that led to salvation, while part of them may only have had a fear of the consequences. Those who had godly fear received salvation and eternal life. Those who had only a fear of the consequences experienced eternal judgment.

We also see that God used Abimelech to rebuke Abraham for his sin. Abimelech asked Abraham two questions. The first question was, “What have you done to us?” By his lie, Abraham had placed everyone in the kingdom of Abimelech in danger of immediate physical death. God said that Abraham was a prophet. In this case, we see that Abraham was being rebuked by a king who had not had the opportunities to know about God that Abraham had been given. The second question was, “How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?” The word translated “offended” in these verses is most commonly translated “sin.” This is the word that Joseph used when he spoke to the wife of Potiphar in Genesis 39:9 when he said, “*There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” Joseph made it clear that all sin is first of all against God. Abraham had sinned both against God and against Abimelech and all of the people of his kingdom.

Then, Abimelech said to Abraham, “You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” Abimelech made it clear to Abraham that what Abraham had done to him was wrong and that Abraham had no right to treat any person that way. Here, Abraham was being rebuked by a king, who had not known God, for the lie that he had told. Abimelech said that was wrong. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that when they sin against another person, it is wrong. There is no excuse that can be given because it is sin. We also want to help our children learn to explain to others that sins are both against God and against all of the people who are affected. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.