

pture Reading: Genesis 20

“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, "Jehovah, 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 & 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 Jehovah had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.”

"Abimelech's Righteous Nation"

This morning, Lord willing, I plan to cover the entirety of chapter 20 here in the Book of Beginnings.

We are approaching the conclusion of a very long portion of Genesis that focuses on the promise and giving of the Son of Promise, Isaac.

- The promise was given way back in chapter 12 and we will see it fulfilled next week in chapter 21 with the birth of Isaac!

Just as the chiastic structure of this portion began with Abraham's journey to Egypt, it now comes to a close with another journey where we will see many similarities, but also some important distinctions.

As we journey through this chapter we will learn some important lessons for us today, we will be given a few things to ponder...

- And, we will see a glimpse of how the work of Jesus will impact the entire world!

As was the case back in chapter twelve; Abraham has again set off on a journey. Back there Abraham was fleeing a famine and went to the land of Egypt. This time, we are not told the reason for the journey & he remains within the Promised Land.

“And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, & stayed in Gerar.”

We see in verse two that despite all that Abraham has witnessed recently regarding God's faithfulness, there are some habits that die hard:

2 "Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."

This time we are going to be given a bit more information about why Abraham did this which we will cover in a moment, but his actions immediately get him into the same trouble he had in Egypt.

"And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah."

- As we saw in Egypt, God intervenes and protects the mother of the promised son; Isaac.

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."

- Now I am sure that many of us have had nightmares, but this would certainly disturb a good night's sleep!

But here we see the first important distinction in these accounts: Unlike what we saw with the wicked Pharaoh, King Abimelech responds with an appeal to Jehovah and has a conversation with God!

4 "But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Jehovah, 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 & innocence of my hands I have done this."

- As we often do in our confession, this King conveniently forgets the part where he simply took Sarah!

However, God does agree that King Abimelech was not purposing to commit adultery and thus He had protected both Sarah and the King: 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."

- The Lord then explains to the King what must be done and why the threat on his life was made...

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."

We saw in Michael's lessons from the Book of Jonah, how a similar message was delivered to the King and people of Nineveh: -- In forty days you are going to die!

There we saw how the King turned in repentance and we see the same here: I think there is an important lesson for us here as we consider the King's actions... This King responded in obedience to a dream...

- How often do we tend to ignore what we hear from Moses & the Prophets or the Apostles & even Jesus!

- And this King not only believes what God has revealed but more importantly he acts upon it!

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."

Everyone has a proper fear of the Lord and then the King sets about to make things right... And not without a bit of righteous anger toward Abraham!

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?"

- The King is brutally honest with Abraham even in the midst of his efforts to set things right!

We should note, the King does ask for an explanation of Abraham's actions and Abraham the opportunity to respond:

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.""

- Certainly, a case can be made that Abraham had much to fear considering the pagan nations that surrounded him, BUT he was dead wrong in this case!

We see from God's conversation with King Abimelech and his response that he was in fact a righteous King who was striving to lead a righteous nation.

We must also see that despite the shortcomings of Abraham, this is being used by God because unlike the wicked Pharaoh who drove Abraham from his land, King Abimelech will offer the very land where the son of promise was to be born. [*Somewhere near Gaza & near Bethlehem!*]

- We also see this King turn very quickly from even the appearance of one who would commit adultery!

The institution of marriage was a creational ordinance and to violate it is an attack on the very nature of God because it reflects His character as we see in Ephesians chapter five and the teachings of Jesus and this proper remembrance of God's ways was not yet lost in this nation.

Abraham goes on to explain to the King why he and Sarah acted the way they did and it gives us a bit of insight as to why this story has been repeated!

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.'"

Abraham is technically telling the truth about the ability to call Sarah his sister: She would have been what we call a niece today, but it would have been common in that day to use the term sister.

- The BIG problem with what they said here and in Egypt or any other times in their travels was the deception that they were NOT married!

A close marriage of this type had not yet been outlawed, but it certainly did need to be disclosed!

- Even with Abrahams's shortcomings we see the repentant King ready and willing to make things right again and even to pay restitution.

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."

- Restitution has been made to Abraham including the land where he would choose to dwell and raise the child of promise.

King Abimelech also addresses Sarah in a verse that has some difficult language, but certainly gives us something to ponder...

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."

The King does have a mild rebuke for Sarah as he addresses Abraham as her brother rather than as her husband, but his very generous gift is intended to clear her reputation and let all the world know what God and the King knew well:

- That King Abimelech had not violated Abraham's wife.

As I mentioned the Hebrew here is difficult and so you get some variations in the English translations: Most agree that Sarah is vindicated or made innocent in the eyes of others and thus some speak of it being a covering for her eyes.

We all know how controversial those early verses of I Corinthians chapter eleven can be where Paul talks about women having a covering and perhaps he had this account in mind when he speaks of honoring women in worship.

- **Certainly something to ponder!**

As God promised the King, we now see Abraham as God's friend and prophet appealing to God on his behalf...

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

So God answers the prayers of Abraham and we learn some interesting things here at the very end this account... What could be seen as a relatively short period of time at first glance had obviously taken some time.

In verse 17 we see that Abimelech was healed and most assume he had been struck with some sort of illness that prevented him for consummating his relationship with Sarah:

- **This was God's means of protecting the mother of the promised seed!**

What must have taken more time is their coming to the realization that the house of Abimelech had been struck with barrenness. We are not given the details about how they were stricken so we have to be careful not to speculate beyond the text, but it is clear that God considers barrenness to be a curse.

So people won't come away with the wrong idea, the fact that a couple has no children or even as many as they would like does not necessarily mean they are under God's judgment.

- **Sometimes it is just that we do not see all of God's timing and in other cases they may be impacted by the sins of others as some of these women certainly were here.**

For example the declining birth rate in Japan could certainly be seen as a judgment on their priorities as a nation of late.

In other situations like our own nation or Russia you have self-inflicted barrenness with the rampant sin of abortion...

If God struck a third of our children dead or they were killed by an invading enemy we would certainly see it as a serious judgment and likely repent in sack cloth and ashes...

- **But since we made a 'choice' to do it willingly such loss is sadly seen as a blessing in many quarters!**
- **And be assured that God will look no more kindly on these child sacrifices than He did those children that were burned alive on the molten hands of Moloch.**

So barrenness is part of God's judgment on King Abimelech's Kingdom and their reward for repentance and restitution is the fruit of the womb!

- **A real blessing that our modern world struggles to understand!**

It also gives us something else to ponder regarding another obscure verse from the writings of the Apostle Paul:

- **Remember Peter told us that his stuff could be difficult!**

Writing to young Timothy Paul says at, I Timothy 2: “11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”

- So just how are women “saved in childbearing?”
- A question that has been debated for centuries!

Well first we have to notice the big IF in that sentence where it is tied to faith, love, holiness and self-control. I think the general teaching of this passage is again informed by the history recorded for us here in the Book of Beginnings, which of course the Apostle Paul would have known very well, as should we!

- IF an individual, family or nation has no faith, love, holiness or self-control it is likely they would come under God’s judgment which can include some sort of barrenness.
- If those same ones are walking in faith, love, holiness or self-control then the blessing of covenant children would be the likely result!

And of course we must remember that Jesus is the focus even of these obscure truths that we are left to ponder... In Genesis chapter three the promise was given that the redeemer would be the seed of the woman and here in our account we see God protecting the woman who would provide for that line to be continued in that day.

- And of course ultimately Mary, the mother of God would bring forth THE SEED, Jesus who would be the Savior of His people.

He would also be the one who would provide the covering for our sin so we would be seen as innocent in the eyes of God Almighty, just as Sarah would now be seen as innocent to those around her!

Let me close with a couple of quick thoughts... I am sure some will think that I have gone too far in calling Abimelech a righteous King?

- My defense is that I think we can see this nation in the same light that we considered Lot!

In fact I would argue that it is a comparison we are encouraged to make as we consider these chapters together. In chapter nineteen we saw clearly the contrast between the life and walk of faith in Abraham with the life & walk of worldliness with Lot...

Both called righteous men by the Scriptures, but one builds upon that righteous foundation with gold, silver and precious stones which are only purified by God’s examination and judgment...

- And the other used almost exclusively wood hay and stubble which is completely consumed by God’s examination and judgment leaving Lot as a man saved as though through fire!

I would argue that here in chapter twenty we are to see two contrasting nations that are not in the kind of outward rebellion against God that brought judgment on Sodom & Gomorrah nor the other nations of Canaan.

We have a faithful leader who will be a father of a faithful nation in the person of Abraham...

- God promises to make them a blessing to all the nations of the earth!

In Abimelech we see an example of how God’s Laws and even God’s Spirit can have an impact on the other nations of the earth even before the coming of Jesus.

- Abraham and the Nation of Israel that we will see come from the lions of Abraham will be the focus of God’s Word as He unfolds the story of salvation!
- Lot and Abimelech will get what can at best be called an honorable mention!

As we saw with Lot last week, their heirs will be used of God at times to judge the Nation of Israel and of course are given as our example so we know what to AVOID!

- **It has been a long journey for Abraham and Sarah and next week Lord willing we come to the birth of the promised son!**

Abraham is used as the greatest example of faith in all the rest of the Scriptures even though Genesis presents him here with all of his warts and scars!

In fact, some have argued that the fleshly agreement that he and Sarah made about concealing their marriage as a way to protect Abraham may have caused the delay in the arrival of the promised son due to her barrenness as they refused to say they were married.

- **But whatever their fault, we will see how they have grown in their faith in the coming weeks as the promised Son is given, Abraham is tested and they find a faithful wife for their beloved Son!**

And of course as we always must, we know and should remember where the story is leading:

- **To the coming of God's own beloved Son who will save His people from their sins!**
- **The Beloved Son Who is now seated as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and has sent us out to Disciples all the nations of the earth!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 16:5-10

“5 O Jehovah, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.

6 The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance.

7 I will bless Jehovah who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.

8 I have set Jehovah always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

**9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.**

10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”