

ABRAHAM DOES IT AGAIN

TEXT: GENESIS 20:1-18

INTRODUCTION:

1. The great expositor, Matthew Henry, said, "The scripture, it should be remarked, is impartial in relating the blemishes even of its most celebrated characters."
2. This is one of the ways we know that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. A book written by men would have left out this embarrassing story.
3. But the Holy Spirit does not gloss over the sins and shortcomings of great men of faith, including Abraham.
 4. Abraham is the only man in Scripture referred to as "the friend of God." James 2:23 says, "Abraham...was called the Friend of God."
 5. Abraham is also referred to as the friend of God in II Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8.
 6. The New Testament begins with these words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).
 7. Yet Abraham stumbled from time to time, and we see that here in Genesis 20. Way back in Genesis 12, we read that there was a famine in the land, and Abraham went down into Egypt.
 8. While he was in Egypt, Abraham lied and told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister (12:10-20).
 9. Twenty-five years have now passed, and now we see Abraham doing the exact same thing in Gerar, a Philistine area to the south (20:1, 2).

I. THE DEPLORABLE SIN

II. THE DIVINE INTERVENTION

III. THE DESERVED REBUKE

I. THE DEPLORABLE SIN (20:1, 2)

1. The Bible teaches that the sin nature is never eradicated in this life.
2. F.B. Meyer said, "The snake was scotched, not killed. The weeds were cut down, not eradicated. The dry-rot had been checked; but the rotten timbers had not been cut away. Never boast yourself against once-cherished sins: only by God's grace are they kept in check; and if you cease to abide in Christ, they will revive and revisit you" (*Abraham, or The Obedience Of Faith*).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "The continuance and power of the evil nature in believers are among the most patent and potent facts of universal spiritual experience" (*Genesis*).
4. The Bible does not say why Abraham went down into Gerar. He may have been looking for some new pasturage for his flocks and herds.
5. Some think that Abraham wanted to get far away from the smoldering ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps he found it too depressing living close by the devastating scene of sin and judgment.
6. I recall hearing that many people moved away from downtown Manhattan after the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. Looking out at the awful wreckage and smelling the noxious fumes was unbearable for some people. They had to get away.
7. In any event, Abraham traveled south, toward Egypt – a symbol of the world. He didn't go all the way into Egypt – just to the border.
8. Many Christians do not go all the way into the world; they just linger around the borderline!
9. Abraham was in the habit of building altars and praying as he moved about (cf. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). But there is no mention of Abraham building an altar in Gerar.
10. It should be pointed out that Abraham apparently made this move without any guidance from the LORD. It is always dangerous to make a big move without first praying and seeking God's direction.

11. There are many unusual things about this story. Certainly it is incredible that a great man of faith like Abraham would commit the same sin twice.
12. Another strange thing about this story is the fact that Sarah was 90 years old at this time. Why would a powerful king with a harem full of beautiful young women desire a 90-year-old woman?
13. Sarah was 127-years-old when she died, so she may have looked much younger than a 90-year-old woman today would look.
14. Sarah may have looked like a woman in her 40's, according to our way of reckoning.
15. It may have been that Sarah was miraculously rejuvenated because she was soon going to have a child.
16. We had a visiting preacher preach here a while back, and he suggested that God miraculously transformed Sarah into a beautiful woman, who looked much younger than her age. Though the man is an excellent preacher, I wasn't totally convinced.
17. But how else are we to understand this strange story?
18. John Phillips takes the same position as our friend. In his commentary on the book of Genesis, he writes, "Hot-blooded kings, with large and delectable harems, do not choose old women to number among their wives. The inference is very strong therefore that the Lord had performed a miracle and that He had renewed Sarah's youth in readiness for her forthcoming role as a mother...It would seem that the Lord did not wait until the rapture to do a cosmetic job on Sarah's worn out old body. Down there in Gerar, at the age of ninety, she could compete with any nineteen-year-old in the land" (*Exploring Genesis*).
19. Henry Morris also taught the same thing – "Sarah was ninety years old, and it is perhaps surprising that she would still be physically attractive to a heathen king. However, she had in some measure been physically rejuvenated, in order to conceive, bear, and nurse Isaac, and possibly this manifested itself in renewed beauty as well" (*The Genesis Record*).

20. Albert Barnes also referred to Sarah's renewed beauty – "Sarah...was as youthful in look as a person of forty would now be...was remarkable for her good looks, and was at present, no doubt, renewed in health and vigor."
21. As he did before in Egypt (Genesis 12:13), Abraham lied and said that Sarah was his sister. Abraham did not consider Sarah's safety. He attempted to protect himself at the expense of his wife.
22. God put this embarrassing story in the Bible as a warning because even good Christians have been known to slip and fall where they have fallen previously.
23. First Corinthians 10:11 says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition."
24. Abimelech (the title – like Pharaoh or Caesar, etc. – for the king of Gerar) quickly took Sarah into his home with the intention of making her his wife.
25. His intentions may not have been entirely romantic. Abimelech may have had political reasons as well. He may have been considering the value of an alliance with a powerful man like Abraham.
26. It is true to human nature that a sin of this kind should be repeated. Former weaknesses and bad habits which we think are no longer a problem can suddenly arise and bring about our downfall.
27. A believer can be saved for many years, and will often discover that some old habit or sin will crop up unexpectedly. And if this is not dealt with decisively, the sin will most certainly bring trouble and sorrow.
28. I knew a preacher who had been saved and delivered from the sin of drinking. But after many years of preaching, he went back to the bottle and it ruined his ministry and his testimony.
29. Others have been ruined through the lusts of the flesh. Satan knows our weaknesses, and he will work on them if we are not careful.
30. The Bible teaches victory over sin. "For sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). God's provision for power is in our union with Christ. We are safe only if we walk in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

31. We are to “live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit”(Galatians 5:25). Galatians 5:16 says, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”
32. Walking in the Spirit makes us sensitive to the dangers of sin.
33. As we continue to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, our old nature will be kept under, and the new life will have complete power.
34. Jesus said, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me...” (Acts 1:8).
35. Abraham was not a good witness for God in Gerar. In fact, he was a terrible witness. In fact, in this story, Abimelech the heathen comes out looking much better than Abraham, the friend of God!
36. In Genesis 20, Abimelech is seen at his best, and Abraham at his worst.
37. The character of Abimelech is in marked contrast with Abraham's at this point. Griffith Thomas said, “Men of the world stand out superior at times to the people of God, and this is one of the great perplexities and problems of the spiritual realm” (*Genesis*).
38. We must not judge the entire life of either man by this one incident, but the facts of the incident are given to us as an important lesson.
39. How sad and deplorable it is when a believer does not keep in touch with God! And it is not hard to do.
40. Abraham said, “Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place” (20:11), but ironically he lost his fear of God when he lied about his relationship to Sarah.
41. Proverbs 16:6 says, “By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”
42. Proverbs 23:17 says, “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.”
43. Abraham was walking by sight and not by faith (Genesis 20:10, 11).
44. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

45. Abraham lied, by tried to excuse himself by claiming it was a “half-truth” (20:12). A half-truth is still a lie! A half-truth is wicked because the intention is to deceive.
46. Proverbs 6:17 says the LORD hates a lying tongue.
47. Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.”
48. After the deplorable sin came...

II. THE DIVINE INTERVENTION

1. “But God...” (20:3). Abraham was the friend of God, but sadly he had forgotten about God when he lied about Sarah. He even encouraged Sarah to lie also (20:13b).
2. Abimelech was a heathen, but God’s moral laws are universal – “Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife” (20:3).
3. Leviticus 20:10 says, “And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.” “Behold, thou art but a dead man...” (Genesis 20:3).
4. Just the other day, the Florida Legislature repealed the state’s law against married or unmarried men and women “engaging in open behavior that is gross lewdness and lascivious.”
5. In other words, it is now official –there is no law against fornication and adultery in Florida (and most states).
6. Men change laws, and men make new laws, but God’s laws do not change. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).
7. The Lord graciously intervened because Abimelech did not know Sarah was married (20:4-6). His “integrity” (20:5, 6) refers to the fact that he did not know Sarah was married to Abraham.

8. Nevertheless, Abimelech was still guilty because he already had a wife (20:17). God acted in mercy toward him. With reference to Sarah, God said, "I also withheld thee from sinning against me" (20:6).
9. Thank God for his restraining grace! We are reminded here that sometimes God, through various circumstances, keeps people from sinning (20:6b).
10. Spurgeon said, "Divine grace has its hand upon the bridle of your horse. You may spur your steed, and use the lash against the man who holds you back...but you cannot go on, you shall not go on. Another inch forward and you will be over the precipice and lost, and therefore God has put that hand there to throw your horse back on its haunches, and make you pause, and think, and turn from the error of your ways."
11. The Lord intervened in order to protect and preserve Sarah, and at the same time of fulfilling the Divine purposes concerning the promised seed. Soon Sarah was to give birth to Isaac, though she was not pregnant at that time (cf. 21:1, 2).
12. John Phillips said, "Behind the whole incident...was Satan, making one last-ditch attempt to prevent the birth of Isaac and hence, ultimately the birth of Christ" (*Exploring Genesis*).
13. W.H. Griffith Thomas describes God's miraculous intervention: "Thus God's children are saved from themselves. It was necessary that Abimelech should be restrained from doing that which in all ignorance and innocence he was about to do. There was also the thought of instruction and testimony concerning Abraham and his relation to God. Notwithstanding Abraham's sin, God would not allow him to be dishonoured in the face of the ungodly" (*Genesis*).
14. Abimelech acted out of ignorance when he took Sarah into his home. He was told she was Abraham's sister, not his wife. Therefore, it was necessary that he was restrained from doing that which in innocence he was about to do (20:3-6).
15. Incidentally, this is the first place in Scripture that someone is called a prophet (20:7).

16. Abraham was a prophet, and “Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.” (20:17)
17. But though Abraham was a prophet, and a man of prayer, and the friend of God, Abraham sinned against God when he lied about Sarah.
18. When older, mature Christians sin, younger Christians are shocked and discouraged, and sometimes they start to backslide.
19. And when older, mature believers stumble into sin, it is a terrible testimony to the world. The sin of a child of God dishonours God when he sins, and hinders sinners from getting saved.
20. When King David sinned, Nathan the prophet rebuked him and said, “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (II Samuel 12:14).

III. THE DESERVED REBUKE

1. King David was rebuked by a prophet, but Abraham was rebuked by a heathen king. It is very sad when a man of God has to be rebuked by a man of the world, but unfortunately it happens all the time (20:9, 10).
2. Abimelech gave gifts to Abraham, probably as an acknowledgment and as a kind of propitiation of the wrong that would have been done had the Lord not stopped him (20:14, 15).
3. It is interesting that when Abimelech addressed Sarah, he referred to Abraham as her “brother,” not her husband (20:16). This too was a rebuke, and so the Bible says, “Thus she was reproved” (20:16b).
4. Sarah was rebuked because once she was taken by Abimelech, she should have immediately told him she was married to Abraham.
5. “He is to thee a covering of the eyes” (20:16) is a figure of speech and apparently means people would not look down upon Sarah – “you have been publicly vindicated.”
6. God graciously overruled the sins of Abraham and Abimelech, and brought blessing to the house of Abimelech (20:17, 18).

7. This unhappy story has a happy ending. Abimelech restores Abraham his wife Sarah, and Abraham, by prayer, prevails with God for the removal of God's judgment upon Abimelech and his house (Genesis 20:17, 18).
8. Sarah was protected from what could have happened had not God intervened. Sarah's position as the mother of the promised seed (Isaac) was preserved, and in the next chapter we see how she was still God's chosen instrument in fulfilling His purposes.
9. Isaac would soon be born, and through him and his son Jacob, the Messiah would come.
10. All of this was jeopardized when Abraham lied to the people of Gerar.

CONCLUSION:

1. God kept Abimelech from sinning with Sarah. God intervened and would not let him touch her.
2. F.B. Meyer said, "If God withheld Abimelech, who did not seek His special help, how much more those that seek Him! You are not insensible of the perils of your life; but wait earnestly and persistently on God. Are you more eager to be kept than He to keep? Did He not implant that desire? Will He not do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think? Is not the good Shepherd strong enough to keep one poor trembling sheep? Begone, unbelief! My God whom I serve is able to deliver, and He will!"