



**Study # 22**

**Genesis Chapter 20**

**Summary of the Chapter:** Abraham and Sarah travelled in the southern region of Israel and came into contact with Abimelech, King of Gerar, a Philistine. Due to the ungodly ways of the people and his fear of assault, Abraham resurrected the old agreement he had with Sarah, when they were down in Egypt (Ch. 12), to pretend that she was his sister. So, they both lived the lie while lodging in Gerar.

According to the custom of the times, Abimelech added Sarah to his harem, but God intervened in a dream to warn him that Sarah was another man's wife. The saga that followed cast Abraham in bad light but exonerated Abimelech, who showed something of the fear of God, after God threatened him and all his people with death. Abimelech restored Sarah to Abraham and enriched Abraham with livestock, servants and 1,000 pieces of silver and also permitted him to live in his land. In great grace, God had Abraham to pray for Abimelech, his wife, and household, and they were healed from their infertility.

**Key verse:** "But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which our hast taken; for she is a man's wife.." Chapter 20:3

God's merciful intervention to stop Abimelech from committing the sin of adultery shows God's hatred of adultery. It truly mattered to God that Sarah was another man's wife. Their marriage contract was sacred to God and to be guarded at all costs. Men may make light of marital infidelity, but God does not.

**Observations on this Chapter:**

**1. The marriage bond is sacred in God's eyes and should be upheld by husband and wife.**

Abraham and Sarah had a former arrangement to spin the story that they were brother and sister (v13). The fact that they both had the same father, but different mothers was at the heart of this pretence (12). But it failed to divulge the fact that they were married in God's sight. It is most disappointing that they would resort to this ruse again after how they nearly lost their skins in Egypt. Man is well able to rationalize many things to preserve life – especially his own. But with God, truth is truth and marriage is sacred. The words of God to Abimelech, King of Gerar, hit the matter squarely, "Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife (v3)." These words to Abimelech could not have been more effective at bestowing the fear of God than the sound of God's thunder at Mount Sinai, when He gave the ten commandments, and when, he stated, "Thou shalt not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14)."

**How does this apply to me?** These words will echo from heaven into the hearts of those guilty of adultery. The Holy Spirit will bring such words to the attention of the adulterer, when He convicts of sin. The law of God is still the rule of life and any who break the marriage bond are guilty of committing adultery in God's sight.

**2. God intervened to keep Abraham, Sarah and the King of Gerar from sin.**

As soon as Abimelech "took Sarah" into his harem God stepped in. Before the Philistine King "came near" her God moved to protect her and all involved. Remember that more was at stake than her purity. God's promise of a son to be born to Abraham and Sarah still stood and God would keep his word. If Sarah were defiled by another man, the promise would be in question. So, God acted in a timely fashion to put his fear in Abimelech's heart. By doing so, God struck at the source of the danger which Abraham had feared and ended the need for pretence. The answer to the fear of man was the fear of God to rule even the heart of this ungodly King.

**How does this apply to me?** God's promise to keep His redeemed people is holds true throughout our lives. The scriptures reveal a host of promises and miracles of God's protection constantly at work on behalf of the Christian. Just as God upholds the earth by the word of His power, He upholds His children by His grace.

1Peter 1:5, Jude 24, John 10:28, Phil. 1:6, 2:12-13, Psalm 23, Psalm 91 are only a few select portions that illustrate the fact that God is our protector. It's what God does! Psalm 121 reminds us that, "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber or sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand." Here is good ground on which to pray for the Lord's protection from all forms of temptation, even temptation to break the marriage bond.

### 3. The fear of God moved Abimelech to offer restitution to Abraham.

If we can gauge the extent of Abimelech's fear of God and the threat of death to himself and his people by the extent of his restitution to Abraham, we see a man who trembled as at the brink of death. He not only restored Sarah, he also presented Abraham with sheep, oxen, men servants, women servants and 1,000 pieces of silver (v14-16).

"Abimelech may or may not have known anything about the true God before, but he certainly became aware of His power now. Abimelech and all his servants were "sore afraid" (v8). He protested to God that he didn't know Sarah's real identity and that he had taken her into his household innocently. Abraham had refused to take the spoil of battle when he had defeated the four-king confederation. He had also been most generous in giving Lot the choice of the best lands. It seems odd at first that he would now accept these gifts from Abimelech. Probably it was not cupidity [greed] on his part but rather his recognition that to refuse would offend Abimelech further." Henry M Morris – Genesis Record pages 362 – 363.

**How does this apply to me?** The true penitent will show willingness to repay and to offer restitution for the wrong, or the offence caused. The Lord Jesus has taught us to go the second mile to demonstrate such willingness. When sued for our coat we are to give our cloak also (Matt. 5:40-41). We are to suffer loss that we might mend relations to be free from man's criticism and God's condemnation. A Christian's testimony is priceless.

### 4. Abimelech rebuked Sarah.

So much had befallen them "because of Sarah, Abraham's wife" (v18). The whole issue revolved around Sarah. Her beauty, despite her age, her vulnerability, being married to a nomad, her covenant position as the wife of Abraham and matriarch in Israel, through whom the covenant children were to be born, and from whom the Saviour would descend made her a figure to be guarded. She was rebuked by Abimelech (v16). The phrase, "a covering of the eyes" is an idiom for protector. She was to trust in her husband's guardianship.

**How does this apply to me?** When a Christian is in the centre of men's affairs God will move heaven and earth to protect them, as he did for Jonah from out of the jaws of a fish, for Peter when in prison and for Paul and Silas when in prison. God will remember His own.

### 5. God called on Abraham to pray for Abimelech.

This is a strange turn of events as God called on the perpetrator to pray for the victim. It is blessed to be God's man. Abraham was a prophet (v7), not to foretell the future, but to intercede for Abimelech. As God's covenant child and servant, Abraham could intercede for him. His prayer was heard for the wombs of all in Abimelech's house were opened again.

**How does this apply to me?** It is a high honour to be called upon to pray for the relief of a sinner's burden of sin. To know God, and to know His justifying power in your life through faith in the gospel, is the greatest of privileges. No Christian prays based on their own perfection, but on the merits of Christ and His atoning work. To be in good standing with God through Christ positions you to pray for sinners. Think highly of the ministry of prayer which the Lord has given you as a New Testament priest (1Peter 2:9-10). Every man, woman and young person who is redeemed by the blood of Christ should earnestly seek God in prayer for His blessing upon on his own life, and upon those before whom you live as an ambassador of Christ. Remember what the Lord Jesus has taught us, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

#### • Things to Do in light of this study:

- Seek to guard your marriage from all forms of temptation. Pray together as husband and wife asking for God to put a hedge of protection around your marriage and Christian home. Ask God to intervene when danger is near.
- Thank God for the ministry of prayer He has given you and begin to spend time interceding for others. Ask fellow Christian and sinners how you may pray for them. This can be a gospel witness to unsaved people and a powerful remedy to their needs.