

Aren't you curious...? Maybe just a little...? How does a worm get inside an apple? ... Well... no! Why would I wonder about that...? Isn't obvious that a worm simply burrows its way in from the outside. ... No! ... If you find a worm's hole on your apple... it is there because at least one worm has eaten its way OUT... and not INTO the apple. Scientists have discovered that the worm comes from inside. ...

So let me ask you again... Aren't you curious...? Maybe just a little...? How does a worm get inside an apple?

The answer is really quite simple! ... (You see) before the apple is even formed from a blossom... an insect lays an egg in the flower... on the apple tree. ... Sometime later... the worm hatches... and is now inside the heart of the apple... then eats his way out.

(Now here is why I am telling you this)... Sin... like the worm... begins in the heart... and works its way out through a person's thoughts... words... and actions. ... And what we are about to learn from today's passage in our study through Genesis... is that sin will come out - from a **mature heart** - that has been given as fully to the Lord... as Abraham's was – whenever worm eggs are still present. (LISTEN)... Worm eggs can still be inside **mature** and very dedicated people of faith.

After Genesis chapter 18... Abraham is at quite a pinnacle in his relationship with God. In the 18th chapter... you'll remember... three times Abraham is referred to as God's friend... and they have fellowship together around a meal. (Meals in the Bible always suggest intimate fellowship.) ... And then God reveals to Abraham what He is about to do with Sodom... and He draws Abraham into intercessory prayer.

And now in Genesis 20... we are to witness a sad and dramatic change. There is a return to the miserable policy which he followed down in Egypt. Afraid that his life may be taken from him on account of his wife... he causes her to pose as his sister... and only through a direct intervention by God... will she... once again... be delivered from the effects of his sin.

It had been twenty years since he had ***last*** forsaken the promised land... and gone down into Egypt (Genesis 12.) ... For twenty years... he had been faithful and remained in the land... living at Hebron in the plain of Mamre. ... Remember that Abraham had built an altar at Hebron... which means *fellowship* or *communion*. Hebron was the place where Abraham had lived and walked with God... prayed and worshipped and matured spiritually. Abraham had exercised such great acts of faith... as he defeated the five kings led by Chedorloamar... and rescued his nephew Lot. With great faith Abraham tithed to Melchizedek. ... For twenty years he had been at Hebron fellowshiping and communing with God and faithfully remaining in the promised land. ... But now... for some reason... he decided to move south to Gerar... outside the boundaries of the promised land...and to the very capital of the Philistines.

Listen to Dr. J. Vernon McGee's take on this...

Chapter 20 seems about as necessary as a fifth leg on a cow. It is a chapter that you feel as if you would like to leave out, because in it Abraham repeats the same sin which he committed when he went down into the land of Egypt and lied concerning Sarah, saying, "She is my sister." It is the same sordid story, but this chapter is put here for a very important reason. Abraham and Sarah are going to have to

deal with this sin before they can have Isaac, before they can have the blessing. May I say to you, until you and I are willing to deal with the sin in our lives, there is no blessing for us.

Wow! I think Dr. McGee is right-on here! Before you and I can experience God's greatest blessings... we might have to de-worm our hearts!

What were the eggs that Abraham had to get rid of...? (Let me tell you)... They were common eggs to many (who are believers today.) ... That is why I will say again... as a result of our study today... we might have to de-worm our own hearts.

The worm eggs that I am talking about –only come out when we are under pressure. These eggs are a self-trust... instead of a full trust in God.

Generally (of course) Abraham trusted God. Afterall... didn't he believe the divine promise... and didn't we read how it was credited to him as righteousness (in Genesis15:6)...? ... Yes... but... once again... when he was pressured... Abraham decided to give God a little help... with a "little" lie. ... (And just like Abraham)... the worm inside of us begins to eat its way out... when we have such thoughts as... "*Lord... I trust You... but I just want to make sure that things work out right...*" and then we go and act out... on our own.

The worm of self-trust (and not fully in God)... comes out... every time that we feel we have to use deception. The worm emerges... whenever we mislead others... (in order to maintain control of a situation)... or whenever we tell a "little" lie... (in order to insure our comfort)... or whenever we allow a false impression to persist... (so that others will think well of us.)

But (LISTEN) such self-trust can have no place in a believer's life... if he or she desires maximum use by God. As Oswald Chambers wrote:

*God can achieve His purpose - **either** through the absence of human power and resources - **or** the abandonment of reliance on them.*

Wow! Please let that soak in for a moment! ... (Here it is again)...

God can achieve His purpose - either through the absence of human power and resources - or the abandonment of reliance on them.

And then Oswald Chambers continued...

*All through history... God has chosen and used **nobodies**... because their unusual dependence on Him... **made possible**... the unique display of His power and grace.*

Now please get this last part of the quote...

*He chose and used **somedodies**... only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.*

Renouncing our dependence on our natural abilities and resources is something that we all must do. (Kill the worm!)And we can never know what is in our hearts... until circumstances arise... which will draw it out. ... Peter did not *imagine* he could deny his Lord... but when he got into circumstances... (which were calculated to act upon his peculiar weakness)... his worm came out... showing that his weakness was there.

It required the prolonged period of forty years in the wilderness... to teach the children of Israel *'what was in their hearts.'* (That is according to what Deuteronomy 8:2 declares.) ... And listen to what the Apostle Paul's wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:9.

2 Corinthians 1:9 (ESV)

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

The more we are growing in the sense of our own sinfulness and *inabilities*... the more we see our need of clinging more closely to Christ — and drawing more largely upon His enabling... through grace.

As we are about to see... it was *stress of circumstances* which revealed the state of Abraham's heart... and so it is with ours. ... A preacher long ago once said... "*We possess no more faith... than what is evident... in the time of trouble.*" ...And I think he was right. (You see)... it is comparatively easy to trust God while everything goes along pleasantly... but the time of disappointment... of loss... of persecution... of bereavement... and all other times of testing... many dedicated church-goers will often fail!

So... lets go to our passage now... and see how God brought Abraham to renounce his *dependence on his natural abilities and resources* (his worm of self-trust)... on the eve of Abraham's greatest moment... before God would significantly bless... and use him... through the birth of Isaac.

Genesis 20:1

Gerar was just outside the boarders of Egypt. Why would Abraham move there? ... Scripture doesn't say. But it would be easy for us to assume that it had something to do with the destruction of Sodom and all the cities of the plain... (which had just happened.) ... The area was totally devastated. There was nothing left... absolutely NOTHING! ... Abraham was a powerful sheik... with large holdings of livestock... He needed

markets for his livestock and other business transactions. ... Did Abraham move to Gerar in search of new markets...? Possibly!

Abraham very well may have moved to Gerar... because it was the capital... and the largest market for his business transactions. ... But he should have never made the move. ... He should have moved to other cities within the heart of the **promised land**... trusting God to help him establish markets there. ... But his faith in God wavered... weakened... and eventually collapsed. ... He just could not see how he could maintain his business and other holdings... unless he lived close by a large city. This is probably why... Abraham forsook the promised land.

He rounded up his flocks and herds... struck camp and moved southward along the very road that had once taken him into Egypt. ... And from the **silence** of God in connection with the move... it also seems likely... that Abraham was acting on his **own** accord... without any direct leading from the Lord. That is always a dangerous thing to do. ... Whenever you are out of the will of God... you will not act according to the way of God. (*Duh...!* ...The egg is now hatching but still inside the apple.)

Genesis 20:2

...And now the worm is out of the apple.

A sin once committed... is easy to commit again. ... No matter how long we have abstained from the sin (Abraham had not lied about Sarah's relationship to him in some twenty or twenty five years)... you can still fail again in the same sin. ... We must never let down our guard and caution against our lingering sin... even if we have not failed in our pet sin for years... and have had great victory over it for years. ... Just about the time

we think we do not have to worry about that sin ensnaring us again... we will fall again. That is why Paul warns us...

1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

OK... Please don't be offended if I state the obvious here. ... The question arises as how an eighty-nine year old woman would look attractive to Abimelech. ... The answer (I think) is two-fold. ... Women lived longer then and so beauty would last longer. ... When she was in her late sixties... Abraham spoke of her beauty (back in Genesis 12:11,14) when in Egypt. But more importantly... Sarah had just been rejuvenated by God so she could have a son. That this would affect her beauty... is not unreasonable thinking.

But whatever the reason... Sarah at eighty-nine was attractive here... and this caused Abimelech to add her to his harem... since she was said to be Abraham's sister and not wife.

Now... God had just promised that within a year... Sarah would bear Abraham the promised son Isaac. ... But when Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, the fulfillment of that promise was greatly imperiled. Abraham would no longer be able to father a child via Sarah... for with Sarah being in Abimelech's harem... she was no longer available for Abraham. If Sarah spends even one night in Abimelech's embrace... the question of the paternity of the child to be born would loom large and threatening.

All seemed lost: they were helpless to straighten out the mess into which they had gotten. There was only one thing to do: God Himself had to

intervene. And this He did. God appeared to Abimelech in a dream one night.

Genesis 20:3-5

At once... he shifted the blame. "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister?' And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this..."

It is perfectly true that both Abraham and Sarah had acted in an **inexcusable** way... but that was no excuse for Abimelech's own promiscuous ways. ... Abimelech's moral principles were far... far below those demanded by God. ... In Abimelech's book it was quite all right for him to appropriate to his own use any woman he desired. ... Her will in the matter was not even to be considered. ... In his view... it was perfectly proper for him to exploit his position and power... and to exercise his prerogatives. ... He could gratify his lusts to his heart's content... especially when he threw the cloak of **legality** over his passions.

So his protest... his loud complaint... was not very impressive after all. Possibly... in that instance... Abraham was more guilty than he was... but Abraham's poor behavior did not (in any way) excuse Abimelech's.... His loud complaint conveniently ignored the fact... that... regardless of the attending circumstances... he had acted in a high-handed way... and on carnal... sensual... fleshly... worldly principles. ... God must not have been impressed with his protests.

Had Abimelech broken the law? ... No! ... And why? ... Well... for the simple reason **that the law was so written that his lusts could be accommodated.** (After all... human laws can be very accommodating.)

The same spirit is evident today. There was a time when adultery was a crime - but not any more. We have rewritten the laws. ... And... there was a time when homosexuality was a crime - but not any more. ... We have written new laws to accommodate those who want to ignore God's laws of nature. ... (You see)... man's way of handling his desire to make sin acceptable... is to frame new laws that make concession to human lusts. – But that is not God's way.

God held Abimelech accountable to GOD'S law... not a human re-written law. Abimelech was guilty.

Genesis 20:6

Do you see what God strongly implies here...? *“Even though you acted according to whatever amount of integrity your heart holds... you are not completely innocent...”* God says... *“I had to restrain you... otherwise you would have sinned against Me...”* ... God had to intervene to keep Abimelech from crossing a fatal line.

Genesis 20:7

God did not call Sarah *“the **sister** of Abraham”* ... but notice how God refers to her: *“the **wife** of Abraham...”* ... We may change the labels by deceit (or even by legislation) in order to put good names on evil deeds... but God ignores our labels.

Here is the first place in Scripture that someone is actually called a prophet. Yet what a miserable impression Abraham has made! There is something about a prophet acting in the flesh that rubs against the grain. We have an instinctive feeling that any person who represents God should be beyond

reproach in his personal and public life. His integrity should be beyond question. It is a sad commentary when our conduct seems to contradict who we really are.

Genesis 20:8-10

It is no part of God's usual dealings with us to shield us from the embarrassments we bring upon ourselves by our sins. The irate king then turned to Abraham and demanded an explanation.

Notice that God did not speak to Abraham. He let Abimelech do the rebuking of Abraham. ... Abimelech's approach in rebuking Abraham was to ask Abraham some pertinent questions to get Abraham to confess his evil. ... We cannot kill the worm... until we confess it is present and doing harm to ourselves and others. ... So three questions are asked of Abraham.

"What have you done to us?". Abraham's deceit had brought affliction upon many Philistines. (In verse 18... we'll see that it caused God to close up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech.)

"How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?". This question is the kind in which the answer is implied. The implied answer is that Abimelech had done nothing to deserve this cruel action of Abraham.

"What did you see, that you did this thing?". This question went to the motivation of Abraham. ... What did he see as gain? ... Why did he do

this? ... If Abraham had answered truthfully... he would have had to admit he could not trust God... and relied on a self-trust.

Now... I want you to notice Abraham's completely inadequate response to Abimelech. Abraham's confession will reveal the fact that he and Sarah cannot have Isaac... until they de-worm themselves of their self-trust. ... This sin must be dealt with before God is going to hear and answer Abraham's prayer in sending a son. Isaac will not be born until this is dealt with.

How many Christians are there who will not judge sin in their lives... and as a result... there is no blessing in their lives? This is a tremendous spiritual lesson here in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Genesis.

Genesis 20:11-13

Abraham's response to Abimelech was shameful. Instead of confessing his sin, he tried to excuse it. But when we try to excuse our evil, we only make a fool of ourselves. Abraham certainly looked foolish in these excuses. He gave 3 excuses and implied one other — none of which were valid.

- **"Because I thought, there is no fear of God at all in this place"** This excuse condemned him instead of exonerated him; for if he thought that Gerar was a bad place, why did he move there?
- **"They will kill me because of my wife"** Abraham would excuse his sin on the basis of the need for the preservation of life. This is a strong excuse which few would condemn today. But the excuse is faulty... It says security is more important than character. And many in our world also give

popularity... money... position... and other things preference over righteousness. But if this excuse is embraced... it will bring much trouble.

- **"Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife."** This was a very clever excuse... but it was also very corrupt. This made his lie a half-lie but in God's sight it was a whole lie... because God judges our speech by our intentions. ... Abraham intended to deceive folk about his primary relationship to Sarah... and he did.

There are few things the unsaved man despises in the believer more than dishonesty. And... of all the forms of dishonesty... none is worse than one that draws its strength from a half-truth. ... That any representative of God should stoop to such a trick... is unacceptable.

...And here is his (not-so-subtle) implied excuse...

- **"When God caused me to wander from my father's house"**. This was the worst excuse of them all... because it blamed God for his situation. There is a terrible meaning in the verb 'wander' which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used for animals going astray... of a drunken man reeling or staggering... of sinful seduction... of a prophet's lies causing the people to err... of the path of a lying heart. ... Six other words are translated 'wander,' any one of which Abraham might have used... but he used the **worst** word available." ... This made God look bad. One of the fruits of sin is that it would blame God for our evil deeds. ... But when we blame God for our sin... we only to add to our sin.

Genesis 20:14-16

Perhaps Abimelech (still shaking from God rebuking him) was trying to appease this angry God... by giving a magnanimous gift (or sacrifice) to Him... via this God's prophet. ... It does not appear to be out of any respect for Abraham. In fact... there are several signs that Abimelech was trying to deliberately disgrace Abraham. The most telling sign was when he addressed Sarah.

Verse 16... "*To Sarah he said, Behold, I have given your...*" (what...? Husband...? No! He calls Abraham her "*brother*"!) "*Behold I have given your **brother** a thousand pieces of silver.*" ... One can almost see Abimelech rise up from his throne as he said it... his voice edged with sarcasm and with a sneer on his face and a bow to Abraham. "A thousand pieces of silver, my dear, for your (a-hem) "*brother.*" What do you think of that? It is too bad, princess, that you do not have a husband, or I would have given it to him." And with that parting thrust Abraham was made to know just exactly how low an estimate Abimelech had formed of him—a prophet, indeed!

And also notice that there is no evidence that Abimelech requested Abraham to pray for him. But Abraham did so anyway.

Genesis 20:17-18

As he gathered up his things and took his leave of Abimelech's court... Abraham must have felt very small. ... He must have been deeply humiliated by the barely disguised sarcasms of Abimelech... yet it was at that point that Abraham's true spiritual greatness was shown. ... If he had

lost all opportunity to ever preach to Abimelech... he could at least pray for him. ... And so he did.

Abimelech's household had great need of prayer because of the affliction that came upon them for Abimelech taking Sarah into his harem. God answered Abraham's prayer and brought healing to Abimelech's household. Abimelech may have despised Abraham... but there was not a healer in all the world... able to accomplish what Abraham did through his prayer.

If you did not know who Abraham was... and you read this chapter for the first time... which of the two men would you say was the believer? ... Surely not Abraham - the liar! ... It was not Abraham who showed integrity... and it was not Abraham whom God kept from sinning. ... What Abraham did was selfish... but Abimelech responded with generosity. If anybody reveals excellent character... it looks like it is Abimelech and not Abraham, "the friend of God."

But before you draw some unwarranted conclusions... take time to consider the facts revealed in this event. ... Abraham's failures were tragic... but from them we learn some valuable lessons to help us in our walk of faith.

God's ability to use even our sins for His own purposes... shows that He doesn't love us simply for the great things we can do for Him. ... There's an additional verse to the children's hymn "Jesus Loves Me" that is not sung very often... but that captures this aspect of God's love perfectly:

Jesus loves me when I'm good,
When I do the things I should.
Jesus loves me when I'm bad,
Though it makes him very sad.

It is so common to think that God will love us more if we perform some great work... some external achievement. But the Bible (and here the story of Abraham and Abimelech) focuses on making a great **heart**. ... Our being de-wormed is God's priority. ... God was working in Abraham to create an unusual dependence upon the Lord... because "God choses and uses somebodies... only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources."

This is why God's plan so often seems to be different from our own script for our lives. ... The stress that comes when you are doing your best to serve God... (the interruptions that plague your prayers)... (the family times that are ruined by a friend in need)... (the all-important letter to encourage a missionary - that gets lost)... ANYTHING in which you wanted to do something for God. ...Even more important than **these things**... is what He wants to do with your **heart**.

The important thing is that we deal with our sins humbly and honestly... confess them to God... judge them and forsake them... and claim His promises of forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 (ESV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Abraham and Sarah made a new beginning... and so can you.