

## **Abraham's Relapse into Sin**

*Genesis 20*

### **Abraham's Hasty Decision**

*Genesis 20:1-7*

#### **Abraham Feared the World: *Genesis 20:1-2***

##### **Abraham's Journey South**

Once again we find Abraham going south, and like the previous time, there is no indication of the LORD'S direction. Why did he go? The answer remains a mystery but he may have wanted to leave the area after the destruction of the valley, he might have looked to transact business, or he just felt like traveling. It is important to remember that he did not leave the land promised him, though he went close to the boundaries (Genesis 15:18). Whatever the case may be, he struggled with his faith and was reprimanded.

He chose to dwell between Kadesh and Shur, then traveled to Gerar, which was a prominent Philistine city located on a well-traveled trade route. The Philistines were descendants of Ham (Genesis 10:14). They were from Egypt and migrated north to the coastal area of Palestine. Abimelech was the King of Gerar.

##### **Abraham's Deception**

Abraham and Sarah previously decided to present themselves as brother and sister in hopes of protecting Abraham. This scheme backfired in Egypt, and they were preserved by God's grace and mercy. But old habits are hard to break, and Abraham and Sarah held on to their little plan of deception. Any form of deception is a lie and a sin (James 4:17). Evidently Abraham feared for his life as they neared Gerar, so they returned to their old ways and introduced themselves as brother and sister. At this point, one wonders why Abraham continued towards Gerar. If there were problems ahead, might it have been better for him to steer clear and return to the land promised him. Instead he placed himself and his family in temptations way. We all have weaknesses, and fear followed by deception appeared to be one of Abraham's. Understand your weakness, be careful, and guard against temptation (1 Peter 5:8).

Abimelech noticed Sarah and sent for her believing she was Abraham's sister. He intended on marrying Sarah and making her his wife. If he followed the custom of the day, which he probably did, he already had numerous wives and Sarah would be his newest bride. Abraham should have protected his wife instead of placing her in danger. It is important to live by faith and avoid troubles at all costs. Abraham committed the same sin as he did in Egypt and similar results occurred. Nothing good ever comes from sin (James 1:15).

## **Abimelech Feared the LORD: Genesis 20:3-7**

### **The LORD'S Visit**

As the proud and powerful Philistine king prepared to wed his newest bride, the LORD surprised him with an appearance at night. The Philistine was taken off guard and shaken by this visit. The LORD got straight to the point; Abimelech was in danger and would soon be dead because Sarah was a married woman. Abimelech was informed of his sinful situation and the certain result, which was death.

Sins such as adultery, fornication, and homosexuality may mean nothing to many but God takes them seriously. Just because society deems something acceptable does not mean it is. As John Butler put it, "Legalizing sin does not take away the sinfulness of sin". Abimelech was given the truth and was responsible to remedy the problem. His life was in God's hands and he was accountable to the LORD. Every heartbeat is a blessing from God. The LORD observed from above and stepped in to protect Sarah. This does not condone sin but shows the loving mercy of God towards His people.

### **The LORD'S Warning**

The surprised and fearful Abimelech immediately offered his defense. This proud king began to plead with God for his life.

1. *He was innocent* – he had not come near Sarah and no immoral action had taken place.
2. *He was deceived* – he had taken her to be his wife with the understanding that she was Abraham's unmarried sister. This was based upon Abraham and Sarah's word and he did not willingly plan to do wrong.

Because of his innocence concerning Sarah, Abimelech was able to talk confidently to God (1 John 3:21). He was respectful and based his request upon the LORD'S goodness, believing God would not destroy a righteous, or in this case innocent and lawful nation.

God knew his heart and his motives concerning Sarah (Psalm 44:21). The LORD informed Abimelech that He withheld the king from sinning. God restrains men and women from sin. If it were not for the LORD our world would be overcome with wickedness. God ensured Sarah's safety and protected her. The LORD often keeps His own from dangers that are not even realized. Abimelech was commanded to restore Sarah back to Abraham. If he did, he would be blessed for Abraham was a prophet. If he did not, he would die. He knew what was correct and was responsible to act upon it. The matter was in his hands and up to him. It was a generous visit, with the LORD providing warning and opportunity to do right.

## Abraham's Humbled Heart

Genesis 20:8-18

### Abraham Confronted: Genesis 20:8-13

#### Abimelech's Words

Abimelech arose early, perhaps before the sun and immediately worked to restore Sarah. This proud Philistine king moved with fear that morning (Proverbs 14:27). He gathered his servants, informed them of the situation, and then sought out Abraham, perhaps looking to let him know how he felt. Realizing Abraham was a prophet he rebuked but never insulted him. Abimelech may have been frustrated but he handled the situation with wisdom. He addressed Abraham, searched for answers, and controlled his emotions.

He began with a question, what hast thou done unto us? He may have wondered why a prophet of God would do such a thing. Men of God are supposed to provide blessings and not burdens. He then asked; what have I done to you that you would bring this sin upon us? He wondered why Abraham would do this to him, was it something personal. Anyone that exposes you to sin treats you unfairly. Keep this in mind when choosing friends and associates. Abimelech and his nation suffered for his decision. Nations are often hindered by the sins of their leader. Finally he asked what did you see or believe that led you to do this? Abimelech wanted to know why Abraham lied and put his wife and others in danger. The questions subtly informed Abraham that he should not have done what he did.

#### Abraham's Response

Abraham was put on the spot and probably never considered providing a public answer for his conduct. The LORD allowed him to be humiliated due to his sin. He was accountable for his actions and had to reap what had been sown (Galatians 6:7-8). Abraham quickly offered five reasons for his behavior.

1. *He believed the people did not fear God* – supposing them to be immoral and cruel he decided to lie. It was a decision based upon speculation and not facts.
2. *He believed he would be killed* – claiming he felt threatened he believed the only course of action was deception. It was a decision based upon on feelings and not facts.
3. *He stated Sarah was his half-sister* – implying that he was not completely wrong. But he deceived and knowingly failed to do right, he became untrustworthy and unreliable (James 4:17; Proverbs 25:19). It was a decision based upon reason and not facts.
4. *He claimed God caused him to wander* – implying God was partly responsible. It is clear that God is not evil and never directs in an evil fashion (James 1:13-14). Abraham probably grew frustrated in waiting and wrongly applied God's direction to travel. It was a decision based upon false notions and not facts.

5. *He claimed Sarah kindly agreed* – implying they had good intentions. Sin is sin, no matter what it is called or how nice it may appear. It was a decision based upon faulty encouragement and not facts.

There was no apology to be found, but plenty of excuses. We are not given Abimelech's response, perhaps he had nothing to say or maybe he just shook his head in disbelief. Abraham failed to live by faith. He knew God's promise and believed it but struggled to apply faith to his actions. It is important to know what we believe and also to live by it (James 2:17-18).

### **Abraham Blessed:** *Genesis 20:14-18*

#### **Abraham's Possessions Enlarged**

Abraham was given many goods, which were probably accepted so Abimelech would not be offended. The Philistine king also encouraged Abraham to dwell wherever he pleased in the land. Abimelech was generous to Abraham and obviously trusted him. This worldly king respected his office, as a prophet, and more importantly the king feared Abraham's God. Abimelech treated Abraham far better than he had been treated.

Abraham was given more than he would have dared asked for. Perhaps they were given by Abimelech to acknowledge the wrong he had done in taking Sarah (Leviticus 6:5). Unlike Abraham, he accepted his sin and was sorry for it. The generosity found in this chapter comes from the pagan King and not the prophet of God. When believers live without faith, they often act worse than the world.

#### **Abraham's Wife Restored**

Abimelech addressed Sarah, reminding her of the responsibility she had to Abraham as his wife. It appears there might have been some sarcasm involved, for Abimelech referred to Abraham as her brother though he knew they were married. He informed her that he had given 1000 pieces of silver to Abraham and that he was a covering of the eyes to her. Because she was married, Sarah was not to look upon another or want another to look upon her (Matthew 5:27-28; 1 John 2:16). Sarah had struggled with this and sadly it took a worldly king to rebuke her. To their credit, Abraham and Sarah learned from this incident and never repeated it.

Evidently Abraham got things settled with God and probably Abimelech (Psalm 66:18). Acting as a prophet, he was able to seek God in prayer and be heard. The LORD kept His word to Abimelech and the people of Gerar were restored. The LORD not only protected Sarah in Gerar but His covenant. The plan was for Abraham and Sarah to have a son. There was no doubt that Isaac was Abraham's son, because God protected Sarah.

## Conclusion

Once again Abraham chose to trust in his reasoning instead of the LORD'S strength, and allowed fear to dictate his actions. Sadly, he stumbled over the same temptation and was rebuked by a worldly king. Today, you live in a world filled with sin and temptation. Every day you must choose to be obedient to God. He has provided the strength required to overcome sin. The apostle Paul faced many hardships, trials, and temptations. He was able to overcome them because he knew; *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Philippians 4:13*

### Point to Ponder

Be careful because one sin often leads to many sins.

### Quote

"It is possible that a good man may, not only fall into sin, but relapse into the same sin, through the surprise and strength of temptation and the infirmity of the flesh." Matthew Henry

### Questions

What was Abraham's fear?

Why did Abimelech not sin against God?

How were Abraham and Sarah affected by this sin?

How were Abraham and Sarah rebuked?

What new truth have you learned from this lesson?