

**Genesis 20:  
Edging Toward Egypt**

- I. Digression
  - A. **20:1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.**
  - B. Abraham is slipping away from the land of promise again. The Negeb dessert is on the way to Egypt. We saw in Chapter 12 how he went all the way to Egypt. At least here he does not go all the way there. Yet here we have a digression, a slipping away from the promises. As we shall see it spells moral trouble for Abraham.
  - C. See map.
  
- II. Deceit
  - A. **2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.**
  - B. Abimelech is the Canaanite king of Gerar. Poor Abimelech will be deceived not only by Abraham but also by Isaac (in Chapter 26) in the very same way! Like father like son.
  - C. Here we see the same shocking deceit we saw in chapter 12! Abraham is willing to expose his wife's honor to save his own hide. As we shall see, his fear is misplaced since Abimelech is an honorable man. But fear leads Abraham to rash judgement and then to lying.
  - D. It is often the same with us. Some one has suggested that fear is an acronym:
    - 1. **F**alse
    - 2. **E**vidence
    - 3. **A**ppearing
    - 4. **R**eal
  - E. Our fears often lead us to sin. Fear is one of the main ways Satan influences us. This is why growing in faith and trust is so essential for us in our journey.
  
- III. Dissuasion
  - A. **3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife." 4 Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, "Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people? 5 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."**
  - B. God warns Abimelech. His rebuke seems strong: "You are a dead man" But recall a fact about sin:
    - 1. It has an objective reality. Even when we don't mean to do something wrong there can still be bad consequences. I'll explain in class how this can be so.
    - 2. It has a subjective culpability. We are not always responsible for things we

do in ignorance especially if the ignorance was invincible. Again, I'll explain in class.

- C. Thus Abimelech declares his innocence due to ignorance. As we shall see, God accepts it. But will direct him to act uprightly.

#### IV. Directions

- A. ***6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now then 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 that are yours." 8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid.***
- B. God recognizes Abimelech's integrity but states two important facts:
  - 1. Whenever we choose not to sin, it is God who has preserved us by his grace. We cannot gloat over our innocence. We must learn to give thanks. An old saying goes, "There but for the grace of God go I." That is to say, the fact that I have not committed a certain sin or sins is God's gift to me. I cannot glory, his grace has preserved me.
    - a. 1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*
    - b. Thus when we escape sin, say "Thank you Lord!"
  - 2. Ignorance alone cannot make us virtuous. Good choices are what make for virtue. Sin is still crouching at the door. Thus far Abimelech has not intentionally sinned. But now he must act. He is no longer in ignorance. With this new information he must make the right choice.
- C. Notice too that Abimelech shares his experience with others. As we learn life's lessons, we ought to testify as to our experience.

V. Discussion

- A. **9** Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." **10** And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?" **11** Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. **12** Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. **13** And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.'"
- B. Thus far the portrait of Abimelech has been a flattering one. Our hero Abraham however is less than flatteringly portrayed. The picture in this section gets only worse.
- C. Notice the problematic things about Abraham portrayed:
1. **Projection** - Abraham's reverential fear of the Lord and trust is mighty low. But he projects this on to them concluding they have no fear of the Lord and will be murderous. We tend to think other people will think and act as we do. The liar figures everyone is a liar. The thief thinks everyone is stealing. The lustful person figures everyone is lustful and sexually out of control.
  2. **Legalism** - technically she *is* his sister, his *half* sister, the daughter of his father, though not his mother. But this does not change the fact that she remains his wife! We often resort to legalism and loopholes when we do not wish to face our own wrongdoing. Somehow we're never really to blame, it's all some big misunderstanding or someone else's fault, etc, etc.
  3. **Blame game** - he says that he was "forced" to lie when God caused him wander. It is true that God called him out of Haran. But it is also true that God settled him in Canaan. Abraham only gets into trouble when he wanders from Canaan! Once again he is edging toward Egypt. We have already seen what his edging toward the Egypt symbolizes. It is a symbol of his own moving away from God and the promises made and toward Egypt which symbolizes the world. Abraham cannot blame God for the fear he finds himself in. He has no business in the Negeb. Sure enough he gets into trouble every time he wanders away from the promised land. How about us. Do we not often blame God for our own trouble that comes from rejecting his plan?
  4. **Stinkin' thinkin'** - His plan to deal with Sarah's beauty and his own fears is immoral and stupid. He is called to faith not fear. Cannot the God who brought him out protect him? Why should he have this immoral fear-based plan to present Sarah as his sister? Is he saying lying is OK to protect some greater good. This is stinkin' thinkin'

VI. Damages (paid)

- A. *14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." 16 To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted."*
- B. Though he was innocent due to ignorance a wrong still needs to be righted.<sup>1</sup> This is what Abimelech does. He is surely generous!
- C. There is a strong contrast once again between a pagan ruler and our hero!

VII. Desserts

- A. *17 Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.*
- B. Abimelech's generous reparation is rewarded through Abraham's prayer. Interestingly enough, he will share the blessing of Abraham: an abatement of sterility and many offspring.
- C. What to make of this awful portrait of Abraham? Perhaps several lessons can be learned:
1. Abraham's blessings are gift, not merited
  2. Sometimes God blesses us in spite of us. This may well be due to the fact that others are dependant on our receiving certain blessings. Thus God may bless an unworthy parent for the sake of the children. He may bless an unworthy pastor for the sake of the congregation. He may be blessing Abraham for the sake of his descendants.
  3. The Bible presents an honest portrait of our "hero's" who were often ordinary, struggling people who, by God's grace ultimately did heroic things. But, like us, they struggled mightily to live up to their call. Perhaps in doing this the Bible shows us heroes who are accessible rather than remote and inimitable.

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<sup>1</sup>Consider for example if I were to take something that was yours (though I didn't know it) and give it away. My ignorance should not exempt me from seeking it's return or of making some restitution to you.