

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 14

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 20

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we saw Abraham at his best when he interceded for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But here in this chapter, we will see Abraham at his worst when he once again lied about his relationship to Sarah. However, the greatest comfort and encouragement is that God is ever faithful to His covenant-promises. He intervened so that His plan and purposes can be fulfilled and he did it in ways that are gracious and edifying without compromise for sins.

This chapter shows that a godly man also has moments of weaknesses. We ask the question: "Is God still faithful when we do not keep faith with Him?"

Abraham and Abimelech found themselves in a dangerous situation due to their foolish ways. The two of them were brought into direct confrontation. How they solved the problem and saved themselves is a lesson for us to learn.

Outline

- I. Abraham Repeated His Ploy (20:1-7).
 - A. Abraham moved to Gerar (1).
 - B. Abraham and Sarah lied again (2).
 - C. God warned Abimelech in a dream (3).
 - D. Abimelech defended himself (4-5).
 - E. God gave specific instructions to Abimelech (6-7).

- II. Abimelech Questioned Abraham (20:8-13).
 - A. Abimelech warned all his servants (8).
 - B. Abimelech demanded an explanation from Abraham (9-10).
 - C. Abraham gave his excuses (11-13).

- III. Abimelech Made Restitution to Abraham (20:14-16).
 - A. Abimelech compensated Abraham generously (14a).
 - B. Abimelech repatriated Sarah (14b).
 - C. Abimelech permitted Abraham to live freely in the land (15).
 - D. Abimelech vindicated Sarah (16).

- IV. Abraham Interceded for Abimelech (20:17-18).
 - A. Abraham prayed to God (17a).
 - B. God healed Abimelech and his household (17b-18).

The Foolish Acts of God's People

Abraham decided to move south and dwell in Gerar. Once there, he arranged with Sarah to perpetuate the same lie that she was his sister because he feared for his life. If there was one weakness in Abraham's walk with God,

it was this fear. Interestingly, Sarah was by now ninety years old (17:17). She must have been a woman of exceptional beauty for we were told that Abimelech¹ took her. The word “took” strongly implied that Abimelech intended to have her as his concubine.

Abraham’s fear for his life was so overwhelming, he jeopardised God’s covenant promise of a son. Sometimes we wonder whether he thought that Ishmael was the son that God had promised him.

But God intervened. The conjunction “But” in verse 3 is significant. God would not allow His plan and purposes to be thwarted by the foolish acts of man. God revealed Himself to Abimelech in a dream. He told Abimelech that “he is as good as dead, because he took another man’s wife.” In the dream, Abimelech defended himself. He had not “come near her”-- he had not had a sexual relationship with Sarah. He asked whether God would punish a righteous nation. Being the king of Gerar, he represented his people. Any punishment on him would include his household and subjects (v.18). Abimelech pointed out that his action was done out of integrity and innocence. Abraham and Sarah had claimed that they were siblings. God warned the sincere and wronged Abimelech and gave him a revelation of His holiness, His power and His mercy withholding him from sin. God did not judge Abimelech for taking Sarah out of ignorance but after he knew, he will be guilty if he does not repatriate Sarah. He was instructed to restore Sarah to

Abraham. If he did not carry out the order, he would surely die (v.7).

God is faithful to His Word and promises. When His word and promises are in danger of being thwarted by the foolish actions of man, there will be divine intervention. We learn that the sin of adultery is not only a sin against the marital partner but also against God (v.6). And the penalty of sin and of disobeying God is death. God’s providential hand in the affairs of man is clearly evident.

In spite of Abraham’s foolish act, God showed much grace to him. Although he was to be rebuked, God did not cast him out from His service but lovingly spoke of him as His own prophet. God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him so that he will be blessed. A prophet is an intercessor between man and God, and also a spokesman of God.² Although Abimelech may be more just than Abraham in this chapter, he still needed to approach Abraham for prayers. The motivation is because of the Lord our God.

We see God’s forgiveness, grace and loving kindness in this episode. He does not treat us according to our iniquities. His love is as high as the heavens are above the earth for those who fear Him (Psalm 103:10-11).

Excuses and Excuses

Abimelech was portrayed as being more just than Abraham. When he woke up early the next day, he summoned all his servants and informed them what God had revealed to him. Then he personally confronted Abraham, “What have I done to you that you did this to me?” Abimelech must have thought that

¹ The name “Abimelech” is a dynastic title like Pharaoh. It is not the personal name of the king, which is not given.

² This is the first time in Scriptures that the term “prophet” (Hebrew, *nabi*) is used.

Abraham was a coward, hypocrite, a two-faced charlatan or worse a liar. Abimelech even charged Abraham that he had done deeds which he ought not to have done. Thus was Abraham publicly rebuked by the man he imagined did not fear God. How sad it is when those not professing to be Christians justly rebuke a child of God.

There is a lesson for us. God often allows us to be rebuked when we disobey Him. So let us let nothing worry us but everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known unto God. Then the peace of God instead of fear shall keep our emotions and thoughts through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Abraham's reasons for what he did were lamentably lame. First, he thought that the people of Gerar were not God-fearing and therefore would kill him in order to take his wife (v.11). In the same way, Satan inserts thoughts, conclusions and misunderstandings in our minds. Secondly, he explained that Sarah was really his stepsister. This is a half-truth or a half lie, a product of unbelief and fear. The important fact is that Sarah was his wife. Sarah should not have agreed to the ploy. Thirdly, Abraham tried to gain the sympathy of Abimelech, by telling him that God had called him to travel from place to place. At the time (25 years ago), he had made an agreement with Sarah to say that he was her brother so that he would be kindly treated.

Integrity Proven by Restitution

Abimelech made a three-fold response. First he repatriated Sarah to Abraham, as God commanded. He was indeed God fearing. Secondly, he presented many material gifts to Abraham. And thirdly, he gave Abraham

free range to live in his land (v.15). That was very generous of him. The gifts and offer strongly affirmed Abimelech's honesty and blamelessness. However, Abimelech also rebuked Sarah for being a party to the lie when he told Sarah that he had given one thousand pieces of silver to her "brother," instead of using the correct word "husband" (v.16). The meaning of the phrase, "the covering of the eyes" is a difficult one. Hamilton suggests that in all probability it is used figuratively to conceal any kind of any sexual impropriety³. Ross comments that it "may carry the idea of a justification of her honour in the eyes of those who would know of the situation"⁴.

Intercessory Prayer

Prayer is God's appointed way of speaking to Him and man can confidently approach Him for grace and help in time of need. Abraham prayed on behalf of Abimelech, and God healed Abimelech and his household who had been stricken with infertility of the womb. God restored Abraham in the eyes of Abimelech as a powerful man of God.

It is interesting to note how this relationship, almost severed because of Abraham's imagined fear, was later cemented as Abraham's walk with God was so manifested that Abimelech asked for a lifelong covenant of friendship with him (Genesis 21:22).

God cares. He is loving and patient with us. If we disobey but repent, He is ever willing to forgive us.

³ Hamilton, p.70. But this would have the reverse effect.

⁴ Allen R. Ross, p.373.

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**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Genesis 20:1-7; Psalm 105:6-15.

TUESDAY: Genesis 20:8-13; Matthew 18:15-17.

WEDNESDAY: Genesis 20:14-16; Luke 19:1-10.

THURSDAYS: Genesis 20:17-18; James 5:13-20.

FRIDAY: Psalm 103:8-18; John 8:1-11.

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 3-7, what were the consequences of Abraham's lie for
- a. God's covenant
 - b. Abraham
 - c. Abimelech?

2. What do the responses in question (1) tell us about God

3. What were the potential effects of Abraham's lie for
- a. Sarah
 - b. God's promise of a son
 - c. Abimelech's family?

4. How did Abimelech rebuke Abraham for deceiving him and putting him in great danger?

5. Did God judge Abimelech for taking Sarah out of ignorance? At what point in time would Abimelech be guilty?

6. What were Abraham's three excuses?

7. How did Abimelech prove the integrity of his heart?

8. What did Abraham do which indicated that he was a spiritual man?

9. Why did Abraham lie about his true relationship with Sarah?

10. What, in this chapter, encourages you in your walk with God?
