

EXPOSITION OF GENESIS

Message #47

Genesis 20:1-18

Genesis 20 is a very difficult chapter because of its location in the Genesis account. As Dr. Morris said, Genesis 20 is “one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible to understand” (*The Genesis Record*, p. 359). It is chronologically apparent that this narrative with Abraham comes after the tragic narrative with Lot. So we have a definite contrast between what happened to Lot and what happened to Abraham. Chapter 19 shows us the influence that the world had on Lot, whereas chapter 20 shows us the influence that Abraham had on the world. Chapter 19 showed us the world’s mocking response to Lot whereas chapter 20 shows us the world’s fearful response to Abraham. Chapter 19 ends with a city being judged by God, whereas chapter 20 ends with a city being blessed by God. Lot makes people scoff, Abraham makes people shake. However, both Lot and Abraham were sinners!

WHEN GOD SOVEREIGNLY SELECTS AN INDIVIDUAL FOR USE IN HIS PROGRAM, EVEN THOUGH HE MAY HAVE SOME FLAWS AND LAPSES, HE IS STILL ALWAYS PROTECTED BY GOD AND THOSE WHO DO ANYTHING NEGATIVE TO HIM WILL EXPERIENCE GOD’S JUDGMENT.

Abraham was certainly not a perfect man, but he was God’s man. In spite of his lying in Egypt, his immoral affair with Hagar and his distortion here, God still blessed him and He blessed those who were good to him.

ACTION #1 - The relocation of Abraham. 20:1

Gerar was located about 10 miles southeast of Gaza and was originally a Canaanite city (Genesis 10:19), which was part of the promised land to Abraham (15:21; 26: 1-3). At the time Abraham moved to this area, the city was heavily populated by Philistines, in fact, Abimelech, the king of Gerar (20:2), was a Philistine king (Genesis 26:8). No one knows why Abraham moved - better pasture, get away from stench of judgment, try to find Lot, but anywhere he went he would face Gentile powers. There is no indication Abraham prayed before making this move, and if you don’t consult God, you are heading to trouble.

ACTION #2 - The distortion of Abraham. 20:2a

Abraham was afraid of the powers controlling the world, so he came up with his own plan of protection, namely tell a half-truth. Abraham certainly knew God would take care of him - He did in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20); He did when he went after Chedorlaomer and regained Lot (Genesis 14:13-16). Abraham is concerned about doing the will of God (20:13), realizing he and Sarah are to produce a seed, he is trying to protect his own life until it happens. Abraham’s theological distortion was that he did not have full confidence in the sovereign protective power of God, so he reverted to telling half a truth.

Here we go again. There is a besetting sin that every believer must set aside (Hebrews 12: 1). Every believer must be willing to deal with “the” sin that plagues and haunts him and for Abraham, it was lying. When Abraham got under pressure his tendency was to doubt God and lie. What we all need to learn is that in moments of pressure, we can trust God and depend on Him.

ACTION #3 - The reaction of Abimelech. 20:2b

Obviously once word came to Abimelech that a beautiful new woman was in the territory, Abimelech wanted her and in this godless culture when you saw this kind of woman you took her. At least the men still wanted women and not men like in Sodom, but this certainly was not the proper way to go about it.

ACTION #4 - The reaction of God. 20:3

Josephus says Abimelech immediately became very sick with a distemper disease and his doctors were at a total loss as to explain it or treat it and it was shortly after this that God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and informed him he was a dead man headed to his grave (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 35). Psalm 105: 15 warns -“Do not touch My anointed and do my prophets no harm .”

ACTION #5 - The defenses of Abimelech. 20:4-5

Defense #1 - The righteous nation defense. 20:4b

The word “blameless” is one that means Gerar was a city that did its best to treat people fairly and honestly, which is a basis for not experiencing the destructive wrath of God as Sodom and Gomorrah. However, the fact that it sanctioned taking a woman, indicates it is not as righteous as Abimelech claimed.

Defense #2 - The false testimony defense. 20:5a

Abimelech is appealing to God that both Abraham and Sarah had told him that they were brother and sister. He is basically saying, they lied to me.

Defense #3 - The personal integrity defense: 20:5b

Abimelech is fighting for his life and informing God he was innocent in not knowing Sarah was Abraham’s wife. **In verse 6, we learn a powerful lesson about God - He does know what is going on in the heart of a person and He can prevent a person from sinning and harming His people.** In verse 7 we see God demands Abimelech give Abraham back his wife and He classifies Abraham as a prophet . This is the first time in the Bible this term is used and it is used in the context of one who distorted truth and certainly was not a perfect prophet.

ACTION #6 - The reaction of Abimelech. 20:8-10

The irony here is that you have a pagan , Philistine king acting more righteous than a righteous Abraham.

Reaction #1 - Abimelech calls his servants . 20:8

God is teaching this Philistine king an important lesson - you do not tamper with those connected to Him.

Reaction #2 - Abimelech calls Abraham . 20:9-10

For Abraham this is a humiliating moment - 1) What have you done to us? 2) What did I do to you to deserve this? 3) What did you hope to accomplish by doing this? Spurgeon used to say - God will never “allow His child to sin successfully.” You will suffer humiliation. As Dr. Wiersbe said unless we repent of our sins and confess them we will suffer the consequences for our sins and the chastening hand of God (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Obedient*, p. 89).

ACTION #7- The reaction of Abraham. 20:11-13

Dr. Kent Hughes said - “Abraham’s reply was lame to say the least” (Genesis, p. 288). The real truth here is that these people did fear God, it was Abraham who did not trust God. Abraham learned a powerful lesson - when you are properly related to God, you need not lie because God is protecting you and nothing can prevent you from fulfilling God’s Will.

There is a powerful lesson to learn from both Lot and Abraham’s lives - it is possible for a believer through sin to nullify your witness or testimony. Abraham must have finally learned his lesson here because this is the last time he lies in recorded Scripture. This lesson was learned on the eve of God’s greatest blessings to him.

ACTION #8 - The reaction of Abimelech. 20: 14-16

Abimelech gave both animals and people to Abraham (20:14). He gave him his choice of land (20:15). If nations were wise today, they would do the same thing for Israel. God was causing Abraham to prosper , even when he hadn’t made all of the right choices in life.

ACTION #9 - The petition of Abraham. 20:17-18

In spite of Abraham’s own personal lapses, he was still a man of prayer. Notice because of how they treated Abraham and because Abraham prayed to God for them - this heathen, Gentile was not only healed, but he and his family received the blessings of God.

Parting Thoughts:

- 1) God’s people can trust God to take care of them.
- 2) God’s judgment will come on those who abuse His people.
- 3) God’s people should be honest and deal with their own sin problems before God.
- 4) God’s best servants have their weak moments.
- 5) God’s people can still pray even though they may have their own moments of spiritual lapses.
- 6) God’s faithful people will always come out on top.

This is an amazing gracious text because it shows that God can and will bless His people even when they have sin problems, if they honestly face it. There is an old verse to the song “Jesus Loves Me” which is rarely published and rarely sung:

“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.”