

Then God Came to Abimelech in a Dream

20: 3-8

DIG: Who else received a message from Elohim in a dream? What punishment did Abimelech receive? What was the king's response? What was his defense? What does God's dealing with Abimelech teach us about His righteousness? About God's mercy?

REFLECT: When was the last time you had a conversation with God about something you did wrong? How did you respond? What happened? Why?

Regardless of Abraham's sin, God would not allow His *blood* Covenant with Avraham to be broken. Earlier God had made Pharaoh aware of whom Sarai really was by sending plagues. Here He reveals Himself to a pagan king in a dream. This is the first of four times an outsider receives revelation from God in a dream (31:24, 40:5, and 41:1).³³⁵ Before Abimelech touched Sarah, Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream one night and warned him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman" (20:3). In addition, He closed up every womb (20:18) in Abimelech's household and harem. Here again the cursing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is seen (12:3). Because the *blood* Covenant is unconditional, and even though it was Avraham that sinned, yet, God still intervened on his behalf.

Presumably Abimelech's response was still part of the dream. Abimelech was stunned and frightened, but he had not gone near her sexually, so he said: Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? In the previous verse, the threat was only against Abimelech. But here it is also a threat to the entire city-state of Gerar. The king's behavior determines the future of his subjects.

He defends himself by saying Abraham and Sarah deceived him. Did he not say to me, "She is my sister," and didn't she also say, "He is my brother?" He defends himself by saying that both his internal attitude and his external actions have been beyond reproach. The king said: I have done this with a clear conscience; in other words, there was no intention to sin against Abraham or God, and (he had) clean hands. He had not touched her and therefore had not committed any sexual sin (20:4-5). Then God responded.

A day or so later, Elohim said to him in a second dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against Me." If the son of promise were to be born, it would have to happen by the grace of God. That is why I did not let you touch her (20:6). Ultimately, all sin is against God. King David took Bathsheba and got her pregnant, killed her husband and other soldiers, and dishonored the nation and the office of the king. But when he repented to God, he said: Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight (Psalm 51:4a). Did he sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, the soldiers and the nation? Of course he did. But he is overwhelmed by the fact that his real sin was ultimately against God.

Then God instructed Abimelech, "Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet." This is the first use of the word prophet in the TaNaKh. Abraham was a prophet because he received revelation from God. In spite of Avraham's own sin, his standing before God remains the same. He will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die (20:7). Now that the pagan king has been informed, he must act.

Abimelech may not have known anything about the true God before, but he certainly knew Him now. Rising early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and told them all that had happened. It seems that Abraham's concern that there was no fear of God in Gerar was not true, because they were very much afraid when the king informed them of his dream (20:8). So Abimelech called Abraham to meet with him and confront him with his grievous sin.