

Abimelech Brought Sheep and Cattle to Abraham and He Returned Sarah His Wife to Him

20: 9-15

DIG: What were Abraham's excuses for not telling Abimelech that Sarah was really his wife? Why did Abimelech hold Avraham responsible? Why was this episode important in the prophetic son of promise and the Messiah? Why did the King of Gerar give gifts to Abraham? What contrast is there between Pharaoh and Abimelech?

REFLECT: Have you ever stumbled by the sin of another believer? Have you ever knowingly stumbled someone else? What did you do about it? What can you do about it?

The Bible shares with other Near Eastern works the concept that adultery is *the great sin*. Avraham's role here is reversed from Chapter 18. There, Abraham challenged God; here, God challenges Abraham through a pagan king. Before, God asked Abraham to pray for Abimelech; now, the pagan king rebuked both Abraham and Sarah for almost having him killed and his kingdom destroyed. Then Abimelech called Avraham in and demanded: What have you done to us? Why did you do this? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done. Then Abimelech demanded an answer: What was your reason for doing this terrible thing (20:9-10)?

God held Abraham responsible for what went on in his marriage (see Bf - **Your Desire Will Be For Your Husband and He Will Rule Over You**). God had put Abimelech in power, and when Avraham lied and rebelled against Abimelech, he also lied and rebelled against God. Later Rabbi Sha'ul would tell us: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1-2).

Vainly trying to justify his behavior, Avraham said to Abimelech: This was what I said to myself, "There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife" (20:11). Not only was he clearly wrong about that, but more importantly, Abraham was not trusting God (Psalm 56:3). Then he tried to explain his relationship with Sarah by saying: Besides she really is my half sister, the daughter of my father though not my mother; and she became my wife (20:12). But she was obviously much more his wife than his sister. Avraham had some shinning moments, but this wasn't one of them.

When Abraham used the phrase: **And when God had me wander from my father's household, he makes the point that this was his practice at least from Haran, and possibly even from Ur of the Chaldeans. This was something Avraham had brought with him from the place of his birth. It was a part of his old nature that had not been dealt with. He had a fear that he would be killed for Sarah's sake if someone thought he was her husband. So in his fear and weakness Abraham said to her, "This is how you can show your love to me. Everywhere we go, tell everyone that I am your brother" (20:13). The two of them had this standing agreement for twenty-five years! Wherever they traveled, Sarah was passed off as Avraham's sister. Because of his fear, Abraham became a slave to that sin. This sin had to be dealt with before God was going to hear and answer Abraham's prayer for a son. Isaac would not be born until Abraham confessed his sin of not relying on God.**

How did Abraham come clean before God? How do any of us come clean before Him? To start with we need to openly examine and confess our faults to ourselves, to God and to someone we trust to hold us accountable. **What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record (Psalm 32:1-2).** This step is necessary because guilt destroys our confidence, damages our relationships and keeps us stuck in the past. These were all true of Avraham.

How do we come clean with God? The first step we need to take is a moral inventory. This will not work unless we are brutally honest with ourselves. **Let us examine our ways and test them (Lamentations 3:40a).** Secondly, we need to accept responsibility for our faults. **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (First John 1:8).** Thirdly, we need to confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness. Don't beg, don't bargain, and don't bribe; just be honest. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:9).** Fourthly, we need to admit our faults to another person that we can trust. I believe Abraham admitted his sin to Sarah his wife. Then lastly, accept God's forgiveness and be set free. **All of us have sinned . . . yet God declares us not guilty if we trust in Jesus Christ, who freely takes away our sins (Romans 3:23-24), because there is no condemnation for those who live in union with Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). I believe that Abraham followed these steps and was set free. I believe that because a destructive twenty-five year habit was broken, never to be heard of again. The son of promise could now be born to Abraham.**

Then Abimelech, who had the right to be upset with him, brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Avraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him (20:14). It is obvious that Abimelech gave these gifts to remain blameless. Abraham refused to take the spoil of battle when he had defeated the four kings of the east. He had

also been most generous in giving Lot the choice of the best lands. It seems odd at first that **he** would now accept these gifts from **Abimelech**. Probably it was not greed on **his** part but rather **his** recognition that to refuse would offend **Abimelech** further.³³⁶ **And Abimelech** announced: **My land is before you; live wherever you like (20:15)**. In contrast to Pharaoh who ordered **Abraham** to leave, **Abimelech** offers **Abraham** to stay. Here the unbeliever out gives the believer.