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Then God Came to Abimelech in a Dream

20: 3-8

Then God came to Abimelech in a dream 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**.