



The Book of Genesis

Verses 20:1-18

December 2, 2018

Besetting sin... what is it? Merriam-Webster defines it as a constant problem or fault. Today we'll be looking at Genesis chapter 20 which highlights one of Abraham's besetting sins.

Genesis 20:1-2 – *Abraham moved south to the Negev and lived for a while between Kadesh and Shur, and then he moved on to Gerar. While living there as a foreigner, ² Abraham introduced his wife, Sarah, by saying, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace.*

In the beginning of Genesis 20 we find Abraham moving down southwest of where he had been previously living. While there we find him once again pulling the same old trick that he used before. He tells everyone that Sarah is his sister rather than announcing her as his wife. And, once again, Sarah gets the attention of the ruler, Abimelech in this case, who has Sarah brought into his harem.

Genesis 20:3 – ³ *But that night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, "You are a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married!"*

Can you imagine having a dream where God tells you that you're a dead man! Talk about your terrifying nightmare! We've all had those moments where we wake up drenched in sweat with our heart pounding and our mind reeling with the images it had just experienced. But what would be worse would be to come to the realization that it's no dream but reality!

While still in his dream state, Abimelech answers God.

Genesis 20:4-5 – ⁴ *But Abimelech had not slept with her yet, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?" ⁵ Didn't Abraham tell me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'Yes, he is my brother.' I acted in complete innocence! My hands are clean."*



Abimelech pleads his innocence to God. You'll notice that he pulls his *entire* nation into the threat but we find in verse 17 below that it was apparently only Abimelech and his family that was affected. Abimelech was quite the politician!

In any case, what Abraham had done was wrong. Although he didn't exactly lie, he also didn't tell the whole truth. In not presenting full disclosure he put an innocent man (at least as related to this matter) and his family in risk of great harm. No man is an island and our actions can have unsavory if not dire consequences for those around us even if they are unintentional. We must be careful to conduct ourselves properly as children of the most high God. We must not only be careful of careless missteps but we must also be wary as we do have an enemy who seeks to devour and destroy us. Don't give him any help!

Genesis 20:6-7 – ⁶*In the dream God responded, "Yes, I know you are innocent. That's why I kept you from sinning against me, and why I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now return the woman to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don't return her to him, you can be sure that you and all your people will die."*

Of course, God knew Abimelech was innocent. But, the severity of the situation needed to be impressed upon Abimelech. What does seem a bit bizarre here is that Abimelech had to take action by returning Sarah to Abraham to reverse the wrong that Abraham did and then he was to ask Abraham (who was the precipitant of the transgression) to pray for him!

Genesis 20:8-10 – ⁸*Abimelech got up early the next morning and quickly called all his servants together. When he told them what had happened, his men were terrified. ⁹Then Abimelech called for Abraham. "What have you done to us?" he demanded. "What crime have I committed that deserves treatment like this, making me and my kingdom guilty of this great sin? No one should ever do what you have done! ¹⁰Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?"*

Early the next morning, Abimelech angrily confronted Abraham. What had at first seemed like a minor trespass had ballooned into an incident that cursed not only Abimelech but his entire household as we find farther down.

Genesis 20:11-13 – ¹¹*Abraham replied, "I thought, 'This is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her.' ¹²And she really is my sister, for we both have the same father, but different mothers. And I married her. ¹³When God called me to leave my father's home and to travel from place to place, I told her, 'Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.'"*

So, how does Abraham respond when confronted with his transgression? He did like many of us do when confronted with our own shortcomings. Instead of repenting of his wrongdoing, he gave excuses and justifications. He pointed out that he didn't actually lie since she *really* is his sister. Then, he alluded somewhat that it was God's fault since it was God who told him to wander far away from home.

Genesis 20:14-17 – ¹⁴*Then Abimelech took some of his sheep and goats, cattle, and male and female servants, and he presented them to Abraham. He also returned his wife, Sarah, to him. ¹⁵Then Abimelech said, "Look over my land and choose any place where you would like to live." ¹⁶And he said*

to Sarah, "Look, I am giving your 'brother' 1,000 pieces of silver in the presence of all these witnesses. This is to compensate you for any wrong I may have done to you. This will settle any claim against me, and your reputation is cleared."

Even though Abimelech was innocent of *knowingly* committing any wrongdoing, he still compensated for any possible violation by giving Abraham a bunch of stuff and servants. Then, he gave him a choice of living in any place in Abimelech's land holdings that Abraham would like to live. By doing this, he was inviting Abraham to stick around. Frankly, if I was Abimelech I'm not sure I would want to see Abraham's face ever again.

Then, to top it all off he gave Abraham 1,000 pieces of silver in front of a bunch of witnesses to restore Sarah's honor. He didn't secretly "buy off" Abraham, he did it publicly in front of everyone! That's an example of the right and humble way to correct a wrong!

On second thought, I can see where it might not have just been a magnanimous gesture on Abimelech's part as it wouldn't hurt to have a prophet of God close by and on your side!

Genesis 20:17-18 – *¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants, so they could have children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had caused all the women to be infertile because of what happened with Abraham's wife, Sarah.*

So, not only was Abimelech punished for Abraham's indiscretion but his entire household had been punished when the women were all struck infertile. In a period of time when an abundance of children was crucial to one's future (no Social Security Administration here), this would have been a devastating blow to Abimelech's family. This would be a good point to remember when we're tempted to test the boundaries of God's patience.

So, what is the major take-away here? God always remains faithful to His promises to us even when we fall short. We should be encouraged by this since we are all imperfect and fail sometimes, if not often. God doesn't expect perfection from us, he just wants our faithfulness. He knows we'll stumble and that's okay as long as we keep striving to walk along the path He's laid out for us.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why was Abimelech and his household punished for the transgressions of another (Abraham)?
2. Why was Abraham not directly punished by God for his transgression?
3. Are our actions and reactions to similar situations today any different than Abraham's were?
4. Is it ever really okay to tell half-truths or "white lies"?
5. How do we today set ourselves apart from the plague of lying and deceit that has permeated our society?