

## Not Again! 5-13-07

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Genesis 20

(The text is too long to copy here. Please read Genesis 20)

I want to be honest with you. I've been dreading coming to this chapter. In examining my heart about why, I find that I was concerned about what to say about an identical story. I don't think it is helpful to just repeat the sermon on Abraham with the Pharaoh in Genesis 12. But my dread may also come subconsciously from the real lesson behind the story; our old sins are often revisited. That's because they are often a weak area in our life. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1Corinthians 10:12) What happened to Abraham? It's the same thing that happens to us. Old patterns of thinking open a door to temptation that, unless we are on guard, leads us back into the same sins we once walked away from.

Abraham had just had an amazing encounter with YHWH who appeared to him as a man. (Genesis 18:1) The promise was confirmed to be through Sarah. Their names had been changed. The promise of the land was reiterated. Abraham had interceded for his nephew and seen the destruction of the great cities of the plain. The people he had rescued from the kings of the North (Genesis 14:16) had gone up in smoke, with the exception of Lot, his daughters, and the town of Zoar. Then Abraham decided to leave the area, but not just the area, but the Promised Land itself. Why?

It may be that from the hilltop near Hebron, the constant site of the devastated plain around the Dead Sea was just too much for him. It reminds me of the story of Sedona Schnebly. When little Pearl died, she was buried right in front of the house where Sedona could look out the window each day and see her grave. It drove her into depression. Was the site of the devastated plain too much for Abraham to look at day after day? (Proverbs 15:13)

It's more likely he did not have enough commerce in the area to support his community. Abraham was supporting a small town. He had hundreds of workers, huge flocks and herds along with great wealth. The major cities that he traded with were gone. Gerar was then, or would later become, the capital of Philistia. It offered him a place to continue trade at the levels he was accustomed to, or so he may have reasoned. He had forgotten that the Lord is the Lord Almighty (Genesis 17:1) and that nothing is too hard for God (Genesis 18:14a).

There are times in life when our circumstances suddenly change. We are left wondering how we will support ourselves or where to turn, and we usually fall back on something we knew before. Instead of praying and asking God for His direction and provision, we rush toward our own quick fix. We forget the promises of God and lean on our own ability. We wouldn't expect our father of faith to do this at this stage in his maturity, but then, it warns us that none of us is beyond doing the same. The last time he did this was because of a famine. (Genesis

**Commented [notes1]:** 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!  
1 Cor 10:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 1 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.  
Gen 18:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 16 He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.  
Gen 14:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 13 A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.  
Prov 15:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty ; walk before me and be blameless."  
Gen 17:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD?  
Gen 18:14a (NIV)

12:10) This time it was probably due to a lack of trade to provide goods for his community.

**Commented [notes7]:** 10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. Gen 12:10 (NIV)

Once in Gerar, he reverted to his old game plan of saying Sarah was his sister. He had been harshly rebuked by a Pharaoh for pulling this stunt, but that was years earlier. (Genesis 12:19) There he was, out of the land promised to him, in another culture, wondering if God was going to protect him after he went this way on his own. Fear captured his heart again and he referred to Sarah as his sister. He was afraid someone would admire her beauty and kill him to take her if he said she was his wife. (Proverbs 29:25) That is pretty hard to fathom considering she is 90-years-old and pregnant. Maybe it was that glow from being pregnant, and, of course, this was in the very early stages of her pregnancy.

**Commented [notes8]:** 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Gen 12:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe. Prov 29:25 (NIV)

Sure enough, Abimelech (not a personal name but the title of king) sent someone to get her to add to his harem. Now it may not have been all about how beautiful she was, but the intention of making an alliance with Abraham. If the king marries his sister, it isn't likely he will side with an enemy army against him. In effect, it would make Abraham's 300 warriors a part of Abimelech's defenses and assure the town of Abraham's trade. It was the obvious smart political move in that culture. What had happened to Abraham's faith?

Leaving the Promised Land was bad enough (it was south of Gaza where the city of Omm is today), but risking his wife's purity, the potential act of adultery, and even risking the promised child is something we couldn't imagine he would sink to at this point in his life. After all he had seen and heard, didn't he have the faith to trust God for his safety? Fear is a powerful tool of the enemy. It can motivate us to do things we wouldn't consider in our right minds. It pushes us into our old defenses and this was a pattern they had long ago decided to use. It wasn't a lie, exactly, but it was deception. (Proverbs 24:28) Out of selfish fear for his life, Abraham was risking the plan of God, Isaac in the womb of Sarah.

**Commented [notes10]:** 28 Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive. Prov 24:28 (NIV)

How easy it is for the enemy of our soul to tempt us into our old patterns! If you were sexually promiscuous when you were young, look out! The enemy knows that weakness and will exploit it. Was alcohol your way of escaping stress? The enemy will put it right under your nose the next time things in your life collapse. Maybe you once chose to worry about everything instead of experiencing the peace you now have in knowing God is sovereign over all. The temptation to worry will always be before you. You see, the Tempter has been studying human nature for thousands of years. He knows your weaknesses and mine, and he will exploit them if given the opportunity. That is why the Apostle Peter tells us, *<sup>8</sup> Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) Abraham's move to Gerar was opportunity for the enemy of his soul. That is why the Lord taught us to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:13)

**Commented [notes11]:** 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [Matt 6:13 (NIV)

If you don't want the temptation under your nose, don't leave your Promised Land. Your Promised Land is fellowship with Jesus and His body, believers. It's prayer and time in the word. You may also include some safeguards you have set in your

life, boundaries that you have established. Don't leave them! Outside of them is where the lion lurks, waiting to see whom he can devour. (Luke 22:31)

**Commented [notes12]:** 31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Luke 22:31 (NIV)

The whole plan of God was at risk. The seed of Eve that would crush the serpent's head was in jeopardy. (Genesis 3:15) Our salvation through the line God had established was in the harem of a pagan king. <sup>3</sup> *But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."* Imagine God telling you, you are dead! It sure got his attention. He claimed ignorance, and God accepted that as a legitimate excuse. He wasn't scolded for taking any woman he wanted for alliances and personal satisfaction because he didn't know any better. The laws of that land did forbid taking another's wife.

**Commented [notes13]:** 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Gen 3:15 (NIV)

Listen to how God responded. <sup>6</sup> *Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her.* God kept this heathen king from sinning because he was acting with a clear conscience. God didn't tell him that he kept him from sinning because she had the promised child within her. The reason God gave was concern for Abimelech's soul. I believe the church has a tendency to do what the Jews before us did, underestimate how much God is working in the hearts of those who have never heard. Doesn't God love the world? (John 3:16) Isn't he capable of working in every heart? (John 1:9) It is up to each individual how they will respond, but I truly believe every heart is confronted by the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [notes14]:** 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.[ John 1:9 (NIV)

When Peter saw the vision on the roof of Simon the tanner's home, he understood that God reaches out to all people. Listen to his opening remark to the Gentile crowd. *God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.* Acts 10:28b (NIV) His sermon began with these words. <sup>34</sup> *Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.* Acts 10:34-35 (NIV) Of course they still need us to go and share the Good News of all Jesus did for them, but understand that God is already at work in hearts just as He was working in Abimelech's heart.

Abimelech's response to the Lord shows that he knew quite a lot about the Lord. He believed the Lord (Adonai) was able to punish with severity. That means the Lord has power over people and nations. Surely he had heard of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. He also believed that the Lord was just. His plea was to the just nature of God. God showed him that He knows all things, agreeing with his innocence. He also showed him that He orchestrates our lives in that He had kept Abimelech from touching her. Some commentators believe that the bareness and "keeping him from touching her" was some kind of sexual disease that swept through his harem. And he knew God makes demands upon men. God insisted Abimelech return Sarah to Abraham or he would die. (John 3:7)

**Commented [notes16]:** 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' John 3:7 (NIV)

In the midst of their lack of faith and outright sin, God intervened. He rescued them and the seed within Sarah from the predicament they put themselves in. At

the same time, God told Abimelech to ask for Abraham's prayers because he is a prophet. (Genesis 20:7) The call and anointing on Abraham's life didn't change because of his sin. God was pouring out His grace upon both Abraham and Abimelech.

**Commented [notes17]:** 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and 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." Gen 20:7 (NIV)

It is God that keeps us. Left to their own ways, this whole situation would have been disastrous. We need to do our part, but in the end, it is the Lord that keeps us. (1Peter 1:5) It is grace alone that starts and finishes our transformation into the image of the Son. (Jude 24) One thing the Bible teaches us again and again is man is utterly depraved. We shouldn't be surprised at Abraham's failure. He is a human like us. What should constantly amaze us is the grace of God!

**Commented [notes18]:** 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:5 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. Genesis 20:8 (NIV) Everyone knew of Abraham and Sarah's deception, Abraham's selfish action toward his wife, and his endangering her and the nation. Be sure your sin will find you out. (Numbers 32:23) We think we are getting away with something, and that no one will know. Suddenly, the whole nation was talking about the sin of the prophet. Then God used this king to rebuke him. "What have you done to us? 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." Genesis 20:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- Jude 1:24 (NIV)

Here is the prophet that has had numerous encounters with God and is supposed to be representing the Almighty God to the world, rebuked by a heathen king. Abraham doesn't have much of an answer. All he can say is he was afraid and thought they didn't fear God. What it shows is that he feared man.

**Commented [notes20]:** 23 "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. Num 32:23 (NIV)

Every time the phrase "fear of the Lord" comes up, I feel the need to explain. The fear of the Lord is a good thing. If you are afraid that your loving Father will discipline you because He loves you, that fear will keep you from doing wrong. It doesn't declare the Father to be mean, but caring and faithful. In this story, who didn't fear God? It appears Abimelech has more fear of the Lord than Abraham. This public rebuke was a very humiliating thing. Many of us have probably felt the sting of a rebuke knowing that we are supposed to be the ones setting an example. God will use others to wake us from our compromise and see how far we have fallen. (Proverbs 3:11) Samuel rebuked Saul. Nathan rebuked David, Elijah rebuked King Ahab, and the prophets often rebuked the people. When rebuke comes it is our chance to repent and change our ways. If we do not, we face more serious consequences. (Proverbs 29:1) God will deal with us!

**Commented [notes21]:** 11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, Prov 3:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy. Prov 29:1 (NIV)

When Abraham was confronted, he came clean. He told the truth about why he had done it. (Psalm 32:5) He may of thought it somewhat of a justification, but it revealed Abraham's weaknesses and shortcomings. He confessed it was a lifelong pattern. He had done the same thing to others. I wonder if during his confession, it became clearer to him how it sounded in the ears of others. Did he realize that he sounded like a fearful, weak man who endangered his wife for his own safety? Sometimes we don't see how selfish our choices are until we voice our reasons to others. (Proverbs 28:13)

**Commented [notes23]:** 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah Psalms 32:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Prov 28:13 (NIV)

Grace upon grace, Abraham is sent out to settle in any part of the land he chooses, and is sent with more herds and servants and money than when he came. It doesn't seem just to us. Abraham was the one who did the wrong. Abimelech didn't know any better. The money was restitution for any shame Sarah felt, and totaled the price of twenty brides! But Abraham came away with something much better than financial gain. He is learning that God is his defense. (2Samuel 22:3) He is learning that he doesn't have to rely on his own cunning. The way up is often down. Abraham was brought down through rebuke and humiliation not for some failure that caught him by surprise, but by something he'd been rebuked for earlier in his life. His fall was a fall forward. It increased his faith because of how the Lord rescued him from his folly. Never again will he sink to such a low.

*17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again,* Genesis 20:17 (NIV) After Abraham's confession, he was again in a right relationship with God. He prayed for healing of Abimelech's household, and they were healed. Sometimes when we stumble we think we can no longer be of any service to God. We failed Him so miserably, how could we represent Him again? (Luke 22:32) Then the Lord brings a need before us and asks us to be His instrument. It's humbling to know that God isn't looking for perfected people to use. There aren't any. He is perfecting people as He works through them.

Through this story we should not lose sight of the big picture. The redemption of the world was in the womb of Sarah. There is no way God would let that be jeopardized regardless of Abraham's sin. God's preservation of Sarah and the child in her womb was part of the plan to redeem us all. Everyone failed, but God was still faithful. He intervened in the midst of man's shortcomings to bring about what He had promised in love. Isaac would be the ancestor of the Messiah, and no failure of man would stop it.

The warnings are clear. We all have old weaknesses that threaten to derail the work of God in our life. Our old nature is always ready to reassert itself and pull us back into old sins, damaging our testimony and limiting our effectiveness. God will finish the work in us even if we fail. (Philippians 1:6) He will complete what He began. If we will confess our sin, our failure will serve as a lesson to humble us and draw us closer. Let us walk in humble obedience to His voice so that we do not take these detours and present a poor example of a servant of God. Though we are faithless, yet He remains faithful. (2Timothy 2:13) He is truly as He revealed Himself to Abraham, God Almighty.

**Commented [notes25]:** 3 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior-- from violent men you save me.  
2 Sam 22:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."  
Luke 22:32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.  
Phil 1:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.  
2 Tim 2:13 (NIV)