

Genesis Chapter 20 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 20 Overview:

Overview of Genesis 20: The story of Abraham's life continues. Abraham traveled to Gerar and once again lied about the status of his wife. Again, it provoked a crisis for all involved. The chapter is divided into three parts: (1) Sarah is taken by Abimelech in verses 1-8. (2) Abimelech rebukes Abraham in verses 9-13. And, (3) Abimelech restores Sarah in verses 14-18.

Genesis 20 : 1 - *And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.*

- Abraham moved from Hebron (where he had lived for fifteen or twenty years) to Gerar for reasons not listed in the Bible
- Some believe that he became bored with the oaks of Mamre
- Some believe that his livestock had over grazed that area
- Still others believe that he wanted to live in other portions of the land which God had promised him.
- Maybe, God wished to keep him as a sojourner and therefore prompted him to move.
- Others have speculated, he wanted to get away from the disgrace with which his nephew Lot had become involved.
- Gerar is in the southern portion of Palestine in the area later known as Gaza, the region of the Philistines.

Genesis 20 : 2 - *And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.*

- Once again, Abraham had agreed with Sarah that they would tell the locals she was his sister.
- It was a half truth, but it also was a half lie.
- As events would demonstrate, it got everyone in trouble again.
- Even good men make bad decisions sometimes more than once
- *“Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.”*
- Though she was a woman approaching ninety years old, she quite evidently was still attractive.
- She apparently was endowed with a very attractive figure to be 90 and still wanted everywhere she went.

Genesis 20 : 3 - *But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.*

- It is important to recall that these events took place in the days not long after God had reaffirmed to Abraham that he would have a son in that very year by Sarah.
- God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and warned him that he had taken another man's wife.
- He warned that if Abimelech proceeded to be intimate with her he would be a dead man.

Genesis 20 : 4-6 - *4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? 5 Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself*

said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. 6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her

- Abimelech protested to God that he did not realize this.
- God acknowledged this and noted that he had prevented Abimelech from touching her.

Genesis 20 : 7 - *Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.*

- God therefore ordered Abimelech to restore Sarah to Abraham.
- Still he warned him if he failed to do so, he and his people would die.

Genesis 20 : 8-10 - *Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. 10 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?*

- The next morning, Abimelech informed his men who were frightened by the news.
- He called in Abraham and confronted him with his deception.
- He wanted to know what he had done to so offend Abraham in luring him into such a dangerous position.
- As in the case of Pharaoh and Sarah years earlier (chapter 13), Abimelech suddenly became all religion and spiritual.
- He had initially acted in the lust of his flesh trying to gratify it.
- Yet now, he suddenly became quite spiritual and innocent in the matter.
- He sought to blame Abraham for all which had happened.

Genesis 20 : 11-13 - *11 And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. 12 And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.*

- Abraham confessed that he suspected Abimelech and his people did not fear God.
- Then he confessed that she was indeed his half-sister.
- Terah, his father, quite evidently had more than one wife.
- Both he and Sarah had the same father, but not the same mother.
- Such marriages were allowable in that day.
- He further confessed that they had agreed years ago to use this same ploy whenever a strange ruler sought to take Sarah from Abraham.
- Though telling a half truth, they also presented a half lie.
- The result was deception and as it always does led to lots of problems for all.

Genesis 20 : 14-16 - 14 And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. 15 And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. 16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reprov'd.

- Abimelech then restored Sarah to Abraham
- Having had the fear of God placed in him, he further gave to Abraham livestock and servants as a gift.
- He also offered Abraham the privilege to dwell wherever he pleased in the area.
- He also gave Sarah some advice.
- The reference to the **thousand pieces of silver** may be the sum total of the gift of livestock and servants Abimelech had given Abraham.
- He then scolded her “**he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other.**”
- Implied is that Abraham as her husband ought to be her protection and modesty.
- Also implied is that Sarah may not have been as discreet or modest in her ways as would be proper.
- “**Thus she was reprov'd.**”
- In Abimelech’s thinking, Sarah was as guilty in the whole matter as he or Abraham.

Genesis 20 : 17-18 – 17 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. 18 For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham’s wife.

- Abraham prayed for God to heal Abimelech and his household so that they might again bare children.
- Implied is that God had at the least caused Abimelech’s household to be barren.
- The time frame though is so limited; the problem must have been more obvious.
- Some have speculated that in fast closing up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, that God had sent severe tumors to the female organs of the women of Abimelech’s house.
- If so, then this would have not only have prevented children but would have prevented sexual intercourse.
- In any event, as Abraham prayed, God healed Abimelech’s household of the plague.