

Genesis 20 Bible Study

Abraham seems very concerned about saving his own life. At every instance where some king might see Sarah and find her beauty so intoxicating that he has to have her Abraham has set a plan in motion. All that has to happen is that Sarah has to say that he is her brother, which is indeed true. He is her half-brother. This agreement that was made at the time of their wedding has been enacted once before with an Egyptian Pharaoh back in Genesis 12. Now we see the same scenario playing out as the group is now in Gerar dealing with its king Abimelech. Let's take a look:

20:1 Abraham journeyed from there to the Negev region and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he lived as a temporary resident in Gerar,

20:2 Abraham said about his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her. 20:3 But God appeared to Abimelech in a dream at night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken, for she is someone else's wife."

20:4 Now Abimelech had not gone near her. He said, "Lord, would you really slaughter an innocent nation? 20:5 Did Abraham not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' I have done this with a clear conscience and with innocent hands!"

20:6 Then in the dream God replied to him, "Yes, I know that you have done this with a clear conscience. That is why I have kept you from sinning against me and why I did not allow you to touch her. 20:7 But now give back the man's wife. Indeed he is a prophet and he will pray for you; thus you will live. But if you don't give her back, know that you will surely die along with all who belong to you." (Genesis 20:1-7)

How does Abimelech learn that Sarah is really the wife of Abraham?

Abimelech and his people will be punished by God for the sin of taking another man's wife. *What two punishments are promised in verses 3 and 18 (see below)?*

"For the Lord had caused infertility to strike every woman in the household of Abimelech because he took Sarah, Abraham's wife." (Genesis 20:18, NET)

Abimelech has a discussion with God, pleading his case. *When God responds who does he say kept Abimelech from sinning?* (see verse 6)

What do you notice about this sin of Abimelech? Who was the sin against? (see verse 6)

We are reminded in Psalm 51:4 that sin is disagreement with God and not doing what he commands. That means that sin is always something that is against God. Though others are often hurt by our sin, it is always our offense against God which makes it a sin.

“Against you—you above all—I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me.” (Psalm 51:4, NET)

The motif of intercession which we saw with Abraham and Lot appears here as well. Take a look at verse 7. Here we see that Abraham is called a prophet, and that he will pray for the king to beg God not to kill him and to remove the curse of barrenness (another motif of this whole Abrahamic story.) *What do we learn about humanity vs God’s role in legacy in this passage?*

So far, we’ve seen God as the one who keeps the king from sinning and the one who decides whether he lives or dies or has any offspring. *What attribute of God does all of this reveal to us?* (If you aren’t sure, here is a list of His attributes)

Omnipotence (all-powerful)

Omnipresence (always present)

Omniscience (all knowing)

Unchangable

Infinite

Sovereignty

Mercy

Judgement

Grace

Self-existence

Love
Patience

Why do you think the text makes sure that we understand that the King never slept with Sarah?

In the next passage Abimelech questions Abraham on his actions. Notice what he wants to know and how Abraham answers.

^{20:8} Early in the morning Abimelech summoned all his servants. When he told them about all these things, they were terrified. ^{20:9} Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? What sin did I commit against you that would cause you to bring such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done!” ^{20:10} Then Abimelech asked Abraham, “What prompted you to do this thing?” ^{20:11} Abraham replied, “Because I thought, ‘Surely no one fears God in this place. They will kill me because of my wife.’ ^{20:12} What’s more, she is indeed my sister, my father’s daughter, but not my mother’s daughter. She became my wife. ^{20:13} When God made me wander from my father’s house, I told her, ‘This is what you can do to show your loyalty to me: Every place we go, say about me, “He is my brother.”’ (Genesis 20:8-13, NET)

What two reasons does Abraham give for why he did what he did?

Someone once said that a half truth is a whole lie. *Have you ever relied on a half-truth, like Abraham did in saying Sarah really was his half-sister? Why is the half-truth not an acceptable excuse for sin?*

It is interesting to note that the practice of brother and sister marrying, also known as endogamy, was a practice of the patriarchs, but will be forbidden by Mosaic law. (see Lev 18:9, 11, 18; Deut 27:22)

When Abraham accuses Abimelech of not fearing God, he isn’t accusing him of not being religious but of being a cruel ruler, one who doesn’t act justly.

Who does the King think is the true victim of this situation? (see verse 9)

Note: Adultery is named a “great sin”/“great crime” in ancient Near Eastern texts, reflecting the severity of the offense in the eyes of society.¹

20:14 So Abimelech gave **sheep, cattle, and male and female servants** to Abraham. He also gave his wife Sarah back to him. **20:15** Then Abimelech said, “Look, my **land** is before you; live wherever you please.” **20:16** To Sarah he said, “Look, I have given **a thousand pieces of silver** to your ‘brother.’ This is compensation for you so that you will stand vindicated before all who are with you.” **20:17** Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, as well as his wife and female slaves so that they were able to have children. **20:18** For the Lord had caused infertility to strike every woman in the household of Abimelech because he took Sarah, Abraham’s wife. (Genesis 20:14-18)

Abimelech compensates the couple in what three ways?

Unlike Pharaoh, who kicked the patriarch out of town after his encounter with them, Abimelech invites them to stay, and gives them land. The land Abraham gets here is his first formal possession of Canaan, which you can read about in Genesis 21:30-31. This is an example of the king settling his dispute out of court, and in so doing he also says to everyone who hears that Sarah is not guilty of adultery. This would be important as we are still waiting on the child of the promises, Isaac. *What do you think an announcement like this along with the generous actions of the king would have done for the status of Abraham and Sarah?*

At the very least, this interaction would have benefited Abraham and Sarah in giving them a name among the people and probably a bit of protection as well. It also increased their property both of animal, servants and land. In the end, it was a great benefit to the patriarch.

God truly does work all things together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His plan. It would seem that the constant failings of those who came before us reveals that to us very well.

¹ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 256.

As you go through this week and you find yourself looking at your own failures, remember that your perfection is only accomplished by the blood of Christ. Every day as you approach the throne you are becoming more and more like Christ, but sin will be your constant companion. Embrace the grace of God and the forgiveness that comes with it.