

Genesis 20

THE PERSISTENCE OF SIN

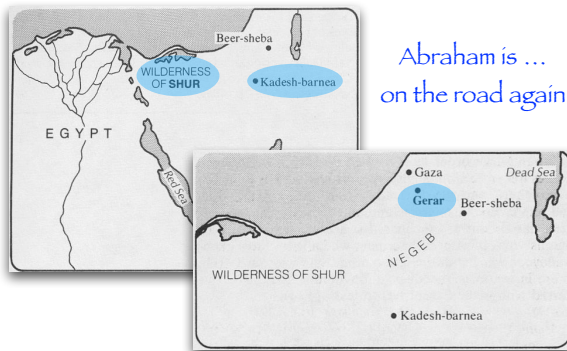
First Look

- * At first glance, Gen 20 doesn't seem to fit
 - ◆ Gen 21 would seem the next logical narrative after the build-up in Gen 17-18 (the promised heir) & destruction of Gen 19
- * The chapter is comprised of two dialogs ...
 - ◆ The 1st between Abimelech and God
 - ◆ The 2nd between Abimelech and Abraham
- * So what is the purpose of Gen 20?
 - ◆ To expose our susceptibility to recurring sin
 - ◆ To reaffirm God's unmerited grace toward His people

Outline of the Chapter

- * The Same Old, "same old" - vv. 1-2
- * Once again God intervenes - vv. 3-7
- * Abimelech's Response - v. 8
- * Abimelech "calls out" Abraham - vv. 9-13
- * Recompense & Restoration - vv. 14-18

The Same Old “same old”



Same Old .. Continued

- * Text does not say why Abraham sets out ...
 - ◆ Could have been for more pasture land
 - ◆ Could have been he is now “released” from Lot
 - ◆ Could have been he didn’t want to look out over Sodom and Gomorrah day after day
- * Probably best to “chalk it up to” Abraham being a sojourner in the land ...
- * In other words, Sojourners — Sojourn

Same Old .. Continued

- * Abraham resorts to an “old trick” ... *sin really!*
- * Leading Abimelech to take Sarah into his harem
- * *Why does Abimelech “take a liking” to Sarah?*
 - ◆ Possibly because of her beauty - though she is 90
 - ◆ More likely because he wanted to ally himself with Abraham who was by now both wealthy & powerful
- * Either way, the risk of defilement now exists

Same Old .. Continued

- * Verse 2 serves to set the stage for God's intervention ...
- * And brings to light Abraham's **besetting sin**

God Intervenes

- * The events of this chapter proceed "rapid fire"
- * God appears on the scene and speaks to Abimelech in a dream in v. 3 ...
 - ◆ And gets right to the point — "You are a dead man for taking another man's wife"
- * And Abimelech is equally quick to mount his defense in v. 4

Intervention .. Continued

- * **How does Abimelech make his defense?**
 - ◆ He appeals to God's righteousness!
 - ◆ Same Hebrew word Abraham used in his appeal for Sodom .. צַדִּיק (Gen 18:23)
 - ◆ He seems to understand he is dealing with a just God
- * Then Abimelech lays out his evidence in v. 5
- * He pursues 2 lines of defense - **What are they?**
 - ◆ First he points to Abraham and Sarah's deception

Intervention .. Continued

- ◆ Second, he appeals to his integrity
- * Note what the text says ...
 - ◆ The integrity of my heart
 - ◆ The innocence my hands .. literally “palms” .. indicating “open hands”
- * What is Abimelech saying by this?
 - ◆ My motives (heart) and actions (hands) are clean

Intervention .. Continued

- * What is interesting about God's response?
 - ◆ It is a “two-fer”
- * What are the two parts of God's response?
 - ◆ First He accepts Abimelech's “self-perception”
 - ◆ BUT .. I, Myself (emphatic) prevented you from sinning
 - God does not allow for any prideful, self-righteousness to take root in Abimelech's heart

Intervention .. Continued

- * What does God reveal about Himself in v. 6?
 - ◆ His omniscience - He knew what was in Abimelech's heart
 - ◆ His sovereignty - He restrained Abimelech from sinning
- * What does God reveal about Abimelech?
 - ◆ His depravity - You could not have restrained yourself, despite your expressed good intentions, without my help!

Intervention .. Continued

* What is the implication for believers?

- ◆ We need the help of God, by means of the Holy Spirit, to restrain sin in our lives ... we can't fight sin alone
- ◆ Sin is a real and constant struggle between our **new nature** and our **sinful flesh**

* There is one more really interesting part of what God says in v. 6 — **Any thoughts?**

- ◆ Note who God kept Abimelech from sinning against
- ◆ Turn to Ps 51 ... read vv. 1-4

Intervention .. Continued

* What is God doing in v. 7?

- ◆ GIVING ABIMELECH A CHOICE!

* What is the choice?

- ◆ Obey — And live; or
- ◆ Disobey — And die

* What else is God doing in v. 7?

- ◆ Giving Abraham respect & honor despite his failure
- ◆ God shows unmerited favor to Abraham

Intervention .. Continued

* How does God express His favor?

- ◆ By revealing Abraham as a prophet who can intercede for Abimelech
- ◆ Despite “acting every part the loser,” God doesn't lose His faith in Abraham

* This marks the first time that the Hebrew word for prophet (נָבִיא) is used in the Bible

Old Testament Prophets Excursus

ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, FUNCTION

Origin of Prophetic Office

- * Turn to Deut 18:9-22
- * What a prophet is not - vv. 9-14
 - ◆ One who promotes child sacrifice
 - ◆ A diviner, fortune teller, sorcerer, necromancer ...
 - ◆ These are an abomination to the LORD
- * What a prophet is - v. 15-22
 - ◆ One like Moses
 - ◆ Of Jewish descent

Origin .. Continued

- ◆ Who receives and speaks God's words
 - Lest he die
- ◆ Who is to be listened to
 - Lest you want to face the LORD's wrath
- ◆ Whose veracity is proven by his spoken words
"coming true"

Development of the Line

- * Non-Canonical (by name) Prophets (non-writing)
 - ◆ Abraham-Isaac-Jacob
 - ◆ MOSES ... the Grand-Daddy**
 - ◆ Samuel
 - ◆ Elijah & Elisha
- * Canonical Prophets (writing)
 - ◆ Major Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
 - ◆ Minor Prophets - The "12"

**Moses was both Non-Canonical and Canonical

Function of a Prophet

- * **PRIMARILY** - To be moral and ethical preachers of true religion, calling the Nation to obedience of the Law
 - ◆ Heralds of impending spiritual peril and judgment owing to their apostasy
- * **SECONDARILY** - To predict future events concerning Israel, the Gentiles, and the Messiah
- * **THIRDLY** - To intercede for people or Israel (Exod 32:11ff (READ); Deut 9:20; 1 Sam 7:5; 12:19; Jer 7:16)

Abimelech's Response

- * Abimelech chooses obedience ... and promptly so
 - ◆ He arises early and sets about to make things right
- * His actions before his servants is unusual for a king
 - ◆ Most pagan kings do not demonstrate this humility
- * **So what is Abimelech doing by this?**
 - ◆ Although brief, he demonstrates evidence of confession
- * Which leads to Abimelech's chastening of Abraham

Abimelech “calls out” Abraham

- * Vv. 9-13 comprise a 2nd dialog .. this one between Abimelech and Abraham
- * It's not a typical back and forth dialog
- * Instead, Abimelech confronts Abraham with three rapid-fire questions
 - ◆ Even though he is afraid, he is yet a bit “piqued” and takes Abraham to the “woodshed”
- * To which Abraham offers three weak excuses ..
 - ◆ Though one leads us to the main point(s) of this chapter

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * Abimelech's chastisement - vv. 9-10
 - ◆ Q1: What have **YOU** done to **US**?
 - ◆ Q2: What **sin** have **I** done to **YOU** that caused **YOU** to bring great sin on **ME**
- * Q1 & Q2 are a pair .. going from broad to more specific
 - ◆ My paraphrase — What have you done? Have I done anything to cause or warrant your behavior?
- * Abimelech seems to pause for a beat after Q2 ..
 - ◆ Perhaps hoping Abraham would step in and confess

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * Then he proceeds with Q3
 - ◆ What did you **SEE** (i.e. observe) to prompt your actions?
- * For me, this gets to the **heart** of the matter
 - ◆ Remember sin's pattern
 - ▶ Look (eyes are the gateway) ...
 - ▶ Desire (something starts to form in our hearts) ...
 - ▶ Act

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * Abraham's weak excuses - vv. 11-13
- * E1: **There is no fear of God in you** - so I'll be killed for my wife!
- * **What is wrong with this response?**
 - ◆ Unfairly judges Abimelech ... How does he know?
 - ◆ Uses self-reliance vs. trust in God ... Has he forgotten Egypt?
 - ◆ Fear of Man
 - ◆ Cowardice

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * E2: I didn't lie .. She is my 1/2 sister
- * **What is wrong with this response?**
 - ◆ He didn't tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth .. so help him God!
- * E3: We made this pact a long time ago!
- * **What is going on with this excuse?**
 - ◆ Abraham did not set old ideas and patterns aside

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * I want to pause here and examine v. 13 ..
- * For me, it gets to the central point and lesson of this text
- * God wants us to see the nature of **besetting sin** in our lives, including ...
 - ◆ Its source - complacency
 - ◆ Its persistence - doesn't go away on its own
 - ◆ Its impact - it effects you AND others

“Calls Out” .. Continued

- * What are some Scriptural solutions that come to mind?
 - ◆ Rom 12:1-2 — Renew your mind ... by thinking about - Phil 4:8
 - ◆ Eph 4:22-24 — Root it out by “replacement”
- * Two implications for us ...
 - ◆ Sin may lie dormant for a time — but it is not dead; you must mortify it!
 - ◆ Scripture is the only reliable source for dealing with sin

Recompense & Restoration

- * Vv. 14-18 conclude the narrative — in three parts
 - ◆ Part 1 is Abimelech’s recompense - vv. 14-16
 - ◆ Part 2 is Abraham’s intercession -v. 17a
 - ◆ Part 3 is God’s restoration - vv. 17b-18
- * What is going on in vv. 14-16?
 - ◆ A LOT more than meets the eye
 - ◆ All God told Abimelech to do was to “give her back”

Restoration .. Continued

- * But Abimelech goes above and beyond ...
- * What is “Abimelech’s” recompense comprised of in verses 14-15?
 - ◆ Flocks and servants;
 - ◆ Safe & preferential dwelling in his lands; and
 - ◆ Sarah’s return

Restoration .. Continued

* Verse 16 is enigmatic — what is going on here?

- ◆ One of two things ...
 - Either a literal (but unrecorded) additional monetary gift to Abraham
 - Or a reflection on the value of the animals and servants given to Abraham
- ◆ 1,000 shekels is over 30x's the redemption price of a slave — a "princessly" sum!
- ◆ Yet it seems Abimelech can't resist a note of sarcasm .. "your brother"

Restoration .. Continued

* But more than these details, v. 16 gives us the reason for Abimelech's gifts — what is it?

- ◆ To remove any stigma "of stain" from Sarah's purity and reputation — lit. a "covering of the eyes"
 - She is to be the line of promise .. God not only preserves her purity but also "vindicates" or better "justifies" her in the eyes of others
- ◆ Oh the things God thinks of are amazing ... His ways and His thoughts are definitely higher than ours

Restoration .. Continued

- * Abraham does his part in the first part of v. 17 — he intercedes with God for Abimelech
- * And then God restores Abimelech - v. 17b
 - ◆ Abimelech himself ... whatever affliction he had
 - ◆ His household ... wife and maidservants

Closing Thoughts

* What do we learn about God in this chapter?

- ◆ His complete sovereignty in the affairs of men
 - He prevented Abimelech from sinning - v. 6
 - He inflicted the malady on Abimelech's household and He "healed" it
- ◆ His unmerited favor
 - He protected Sarah and further enriched Abraham despite their sinful deception

Closing Thoughts

* What seems like an odd chapter actually has some profound lessons for us ...

* Reflected in three points of emphasis

- ◆ Our susceptibility to and battle with besetting sin
 - Sin doesn't take days off and neither should we in our battle against it ... [Read 1 Pet 5:8](#)
- ◆ God's sovereignty in accomplishing His purposes ... despite our sin
- ◆ God's unmerited favor in caring for us
