

2. What do you make of Abraham's defense?
3. How does the text undermine Abraham's concern, "There is surely no fear of God in this place?"
4. The Book of Proverbs tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7)." How do Abimelek and his companions display a more robust fear of the Lord than Abraham?
5. How is their "fear of the Lord" different than what we might expect of Abraham and ourselves?

ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR ABIMILEK (vv. 14-18)

¹⁴ Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelek said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."

¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."

¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, ¹⁸ for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

1. God could have chosen any means he desired to restore Abimelek's household. Why do you think he chose Abraham's prayer as the means of grace?
2. Why do you think God has chosen prayer as a means of grace for us?
3. What are some of the other means that God has assigned as avenues of grace?
4. What might have Abimelek learned from having Abraham pray for him?
5. What might have Abraham learned from praying for Abimelek?

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Genesis 20 has to be one of the most disappointing turns in Abraham's story. It is disappointing because Abraham is repeating an old mistake. It is disappointing because the stakes are so much higher now. It is disappointing because Abraham has walked with God for the better part of twenty-five years. He ought to know better. And while we should never judge an Old Testament figure by the fuller revelation we have received in Christ, we are disappointed that Abraham falls so far short of the New Testament ideal.

My disappointment with Abraham subsides a bit when I consider my journey. I tend to make the same mistakes over and over again. I've walked with God much longer than Abraham. Unlike Abraham, I have the benefit of the entire Biblical story and how all of it is beautifully summed up in Christ. I enjoy far greater intimacy with God through Christ by His Spirit, and the Spirit "helps [me] in [all] my weakness (Romans 8:26)." Despite all of these advantages, I fall short of the New Testament ideal. I may not have endangered my wife in exactly the way that Abraham endangers Sarah, but I have never come close to loving her the way that Christ loves his church (Ephesians 5:25-28).

I suppose we can draw some comfort from the fact that Abraham seems to be made of the same stuff we are. We are all broken people living in a broken world. None of us, after all, are perfect. But that is not where Scripture would have us look for comfort. We find our comfort in God's faithfulness. The Apostle Paul reminds us, even "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself (2 Timothy 2:13)." And that is the principle we find at work in this passage.

ABIMELEK TAKES SARAH TO BE HIS WIFE (vv. 1-2)

20:1 Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

1. The last time Abraham journeyed into the Negev, “Pharaoh’s officials saw [Sarai], they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace (Genesis 12:15).” Why might we expect things to be different this time around?
2. What advice would you have given Abraham as he moved his family into the Negev?
3. While it is easy to judge Abraham for falling into an old sin pattern, most of us do the same thing. How do you explain this tendency?
4. How should we encourage each other in light of this tendency? How can we help each other avoid falling into old patterns?

GOD REBUKES ABIMELEK (vv. 3-7)

³ But God came to Abimelek 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.”

⁴ Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵ Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister,’ and didn’t she also say, ‘He is my brother’? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.”

⁶ 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. 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 who belong to you will die.”

1. Who comes across more sympathetic in this episode, Abraham or Abimelech? You might want to tease out your answer on this one.
2. How does Abimelech describe his heart and character?
3. “Clear conscience (Hebrew: “whole or perfect heart”) refers to Abimelech’s motives. “Clean hands” refers to his actions. Why do you think God affirms he may have had “clean hands” but does not allow that his heart was in the right place?

4. Abimelech’s claims reflect the observation of the Psalmist when he asks and answers: “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart... (Psalm 24:3).” Why is it important to consider both hands and heart when we stand in God’s presence?
5. What is the real source of Abimelech’s innocence in this particular instance?
6. What encouragement can we draw from the fact that “[God] kept [Abimelek] from sinning against [him]?”

ABIMELEK REBUKES ABRAHAM (vv. 8-13)

⁸ Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid.

⁹ Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, “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 never be done.”

¹⁰ And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

¹¹ Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ ¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.” ’ ”

1. This is the second time a foreign ruler lectures Abraham on the appropriateness of his behavior. There is a remarkable difference however, in the way Abimelech responds to Abraham’s deception and Pharaoh does. Gordon Wenham observes:

This dialogue between Abimelech and Abraham is similar in fashion to the Pharaoh’s address to Abraham in 12:18–19. Both say, “What have you done?” echoing 3:13. But after that, the speeches and actions diverge markedly. Pharaoh put all the blame on Abraham; Abimelech is open to the suggestion that he might have sinned against Abraham. Pharaoh gave Abraham no chance to reply; Abimelech does. Pharaoh expelled Abraham from Egypt immediately; Abimelech lets Abraham have the pick of the land. (Genesis 16–50. Vol. 2. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1994).

How do you explain the differences?