

GENESIS

Lesson 37

"She Is My Sister" – Genesis 20:1-18

Abraham and Abimelek

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.

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."

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."'"

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.

Genesis 20:1-18 [NIV]

Abraham, King Abimelech, and Lies and Deception

To those who regularly study the bible, the story of Abraham and King Abimelech (also spelled Abimelek) is a familiar one. On the surface, Abraham lies again, and Sarah goes along with it. This similar to when Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt and lied to Pharaoh about their relationship. In both cases, Abraham feared for his own life, believing that both Pharaoh and King Abimelech would have him killed in order to take Sarah for a wife—a testament for sure to the beauty of Sarah.

We also see similarities in both stories as the two rulers suffered consequences for their choice of Sarah as a wife, and both gave gifts to Abraham and sent him and Sarah on their way. Abimelech even gave Abraham a choice of any land in his realm in which to settle.

Read the following and list all of the possessions Abraham gained from both the Pharaoh and from King Abimelech:

1. Genesis 12:16 – Possessions obtained from the Pharaoh

2. Genesis 20:14-16 – Possessions obtained from King Abimelech

It is interesting to note that in both cases where Abraham lied, God provided riches, livestock, and slaves to Abraham. In Abimelech's case, Abraham also got land. His wealth continued to increase, even though he lied. Does this mean that we should lie, and God will prosper us? Hardly. If not, then what is really going on?

I think in most bible classes, the emphasis in Genesis Chapter 20 is on Abraham's continued use of the same lie to protect himself. But that focus causes us to overlook the bigger picture, including God's involvement in both narratives.

Let's take a close look at God's intervention in both stories:

3. Why does scripture say that God punished the Pharaoh for Abraham's lie? (See Genesis 12:17)

4. What does God threaten to do to King Abimelech? (See Genesis 20:3-7)

5. We see God punishing, or threatening to punish, the two rulers for taking Sarah to wife, even though they did not know that Abraham was lying. It's interesting that Abraham and Sarah are not punished—only those that believed their lie. What is going on? Why would God be protecting Abraham and Sarah, and who did God say was being harmed by Abimelech if he took Sarah? (Reference the verses below.)
 - a. Genesis 18:10,14

 - b. Genesis 20:6

You might be asking how these two passages are connected. Or perhaps you now see God's bigger picture—a picture that Abraham and Sarah did not see—that the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world will be descended from the son that Abraham and Sarah will soon give birth to, i.e., Isaac. (See Numbers 24:17-19) In both Genesis narratives involving the Pharaoh and King Abimelech, God is protecting Abraham and Sarah in order for God's will to be accomplished through their coming descendants and the birth of Jesus, the savior of the world.

How often have each of us been so focused on our immediate fear that we failed to see God's bigger plan? This was the case with Abraham and Sarah. Fortunately for us, God intervened—just as he does in our lives when we wander from His will. God's eternal plan for mankind is so much greater than our limited wisdom that we often only see the challenges right in front of us and not God's overall plan for our lives and His creation.

Lies, Shrewdness, and Deception: A Family Trait

During my Ph.D. research studying Abraham and the Patriarchs, I noted a family trait: deception, lies and shrewdness, all of which surface many times in Patriarchal narratives.

Read each of the following verses and note the manifestation of the above behaviors in each reference:

6. Genesis 26:1-11

7. Genesis 27:5-46

8. Genesis 29:21-30

9. Genesis 30:31-43

10. Genesis 37:17-36

11. Genesis 42:1-45:25

We will see the above traits manifested again as we continue our study of Genesis. However, what I like about these and other examples of man's faults and failures that we find in the biblical text is that they make the Bible real. You see, God wasn't working with perfect people or clones; He was working with sinners, just like us, and He accomplished His will through them. The Bible isn't a book of magic or a collection of stories with happy endings. It is a book written by God assuring us that His will will be done; and in His eternal plan, sinners just like us will find salvation through God's only son Jesus. It is because of God, and not ourselves, that we have the hope of heaven. (See Ephesians 2:8)

Thanks for studying with us!

In Christ,

Wes