

Genesis 20 – Haven't we been here once before?

vs. 1 – After the destruction of the cities in the plains, Abraham leaves the hills and heads south toward Egypt.

We're not given any reason for the move, no mention of famine or any other problems.

But remember, Abraham is a nomad by lifestyle, with all his mouths to feed he has to keep on the move.

Looks like a pretty sensible place for a wealthy herdsman to be, lots of water, grass, near some big cities and roads for trading purposes

There's only one problem: Abraham believes that he's in the midst of evil people "the Fear of God is not in this place." and he lies again with Sarah's help that she's his sister and danged if she doesn't get taken back into another harem.

Anyway, back to chapter 20...

Notice the difference between this time around and when the same thing happened in Egypt some chapters back.

I mean other than the fact that now Sarah is 99 years old.

The first difference to notice is the time taken to set up the situation.

In chapter 12 it takes 7 verses to set up the situation and involves a conversation between Abraham and Sarah.

in chapter 20 we told given the same situation in only 2 verses.

The second difference is between Pharaoh and Abimelech.

Pharaoh has to figure out what's happening on his own after the plagues and problems have hit.

Abimelech is warned in a dream by God who affirms Abimelech's honor but also tells him to give Sarah back.

The next difference is in the reactions of Pharaoh and Abimelech.

Both demand an accounting of Abraham, but Pharaoh and his court are angry about their resulting problems and Abimelech and his court are scared of God and the ensuing judgment.

There's another "AHA!" moment. Abraham excuses his actions in both instances as something he had to do to survive because he knew that there was "no fear of God in this place," but the reaction of Abimelech and his court is that they were afraid, the very reaction that Abraham was afraid wouldn't happen.

In other words, there is a lapse in judgment by Abraham in both cases, but it's not the same one, so maybe there's a different moral for us to learn from the two instances.

Abraham's mistake in Egypt was 1) in going to Egypt in the first place and 2) lying about Sarai in the second. His failure is his failure to trust in God and to put his trust in his own ability and cleverness. (That's also how we wound up in Haran waiting on Terah to kick the bucket and we got Ishmael, you'll recall)

Abraham's mistake in Gerar was not a failure to trust God so much as it was a failure of assessment of his neighbors. After all, he'd just watched the smoke from

the destruction of five cities of wicked neighbors, so he may have assumed that everybody else was just as wicked too.

Instead of a lack of faith in God, this time his sin was the result of a lack of faith in his fellow people. He assumed (and we all know what that does) that they were worse people than he and responded with the sin of lying and of perpetuating adultery because he thought that the people he was dealing with weren't as Godly or righteous as he.

Also notice the difference of the consequences:

In Egypt he's given a great deal of wealth and then kicked out of the country. In Gerar he's given gifts as a compensation for the wrong done to Sarah and to restore her honor and he's told to live wherever in the land he pleases.

Also notice the difference in the cure of the lands:

In Egypt, pharaoh and his household are cured by God after Abraham is thrown out of the country on his ear;

In Gerar, Abimelech and his household are cured when Abraham prays for them as an interceding prophet after the relationship between him and Abimelech is restored.

Also notice the difference in Abraham's response to being confronted with his sin:

In Egypt he has no answer for Pharaoh, which is the only appropriate reply, and his only explanation is given in the conversation between him and Sarah, when he tells her that he "knows" that she's a fox.

Before Abimelech, he starts off well when says that he did what he did because he "thought" that there was no fear of God in the land, but then instead of quitting when he should, he adds the three following excuses (not exactly in order given):

- it's what they've always done in their travels;
- 2) it's not exactly a lie because she's his half-sister; and
- 3) indirectly he pulls an Adam and Eve and blames God, saying that it only happened because God had caused him to be a wanderer in the land.

There's another theme or idea we can get from this account: in the garden Adam blamed God for the teeth marks in the fruit "The woman **you** gave me gave it to me..."

in Gerar Abraham in effect said the whole thing was God's fault because he "**caused** him to wander..."

Here's a man declared to be righteous and commanded to walk upright before God and stated to be the friend of God, yet even this man still has the old Adam, the original sin nature, in him and it can come out at the drop of a turban.

Cousin Terry Cogburn, who had many memorable quotes, though not all can be repeated, once said:

"Y'know, I always thought they was just four directions: north, east, south and west. But once you've picked up a armload of baccker sticks you find out they's at least forty-seven more."

This chapter is a good illustration of that principle. Seems like a simple story against lying at first glance, but as we've seen in the last twenty slide, there's a lot of directions we can take the story in. We've already been off in about four or five, I've actually already lost count.

So, in no particular order, here are what a few of the commentators believe to be the main points we should get from chapter 20:

Derek Kidner

Tyndale Old Testament Commentary

Abraham's moments of failure come as anti-climaxes after some spiritual exertion
Abimelech's questions emphasize that Abraham had only been thinking about himself when he decided to lie.

Abraham's excuse about being caused to wander literally reads "When gods caused me to wander" and sounds more like one pagan talking to another than a man of God.

Warren Wiersbe – Be Obedient – Genesis 12-25

1. Believers do sin.
2. When believers sin, they suffer
3. Sinning believers can be forgiven and restored

The basic cause of Abraham's failure was that he and Sarah had failed to repent of the sin when it happened in Egypt.

"A lighthearted admission of sin is not the same as a brokenhearted confession of sin"

The costs of Abraham's sin

- 1) his character
- 2) his testimony
- 3) his ministry
- 4) nearly cost him Sarah
- 5) threatened the very existence of Isaac
- 6) set a pattern for Isaac to repeat in the future with another Abimelech

"Believers do sin; but that does not disannul their faith or destroy their salvation" – Abraham was declared righteous and that didn't change because his actions didn't live up to his faith. Abimelech behaved more honorably than Abraham, but that didn't change the fact that he was what we'd call "saved" and Abimelech wasn't.

"Abraham was justified by faith and had a righteous standing before God. Justification does not change; we are accepted in Jesus Christ no matter what we are in ourselves. Of course, the fact that we are justified before God means that there will be a change in our lives; for 'faith without works is dead'. But our *position in Christ* (justification) is not altered by our *practice on earth* (sanctification.)

The important thing is that we deal with our sins humbly and honestly, confess them to God, judge them and forsake them, and claim His promises of forgiveness. Abraham and Sarah made a new beginning, and so can you."

R. Kent Hughes
Preaching the Word Series

The conclusion of the story “drips with grace”

God showed grace by protecting Abimelech, Sarah, the unborn Isaac and by restoring Abraham to his position as prophet

Abimelech showed grace to Abraham and Sarah by giving them gifts equivalent to the price of twenty brides and welcoming them to live in his land.

Abraham showed grace to Abimelech by praying for him and as a result God healed the women of the land so that they could bear children.

And, lastly, God showed grace to Sarah, but we have to read closely to find it. In Genesis 16:2 Sarah had said “Behold now, the LORD has prevented [literally, “closed”] me from bearing children.”

Now the same thing has happened to the whole house: “The LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife”

Sarah had also said that another reason she couldn’t have a child was due to the age of Abraham, but now the narrator tells us: “God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.”

The message to Sarah in real life and to us in the literary retelling of that life is clear:

“Certainly the Lord could open Sarah’s womb just as he did for the Philistine women. Sarah, take heart – Laughter is coming soon!”

There’s probably other direction we could take that, but that is a good ending for the chapter and an introduction to chapter 21.