

Bible Study for June 30, 2021

[adapted from The Serendipity Study Bible]

Read Genesis 20

Abraham journeyed from there to the Negev^[a] region and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he lived as a temporary resident^[b] in Gerar, ² Abraham said about his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her.

³ But God appeared^[c] to Abimelech in a dream at night and said to him, “You are as good as dead^[d] because of the woman you have taken, for she is someone else’s wife.”^[e]

⁴ Now Abimelech had not gone near her. He said, “Lord,^[f] would you really slaughter an innocent nation?^[g] ⁵ Did Abraham^[h] not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said,^[i] ‘He is my brother.’ I have done this with a clear conscience^[j] and with innocent hands!”

⁶ Then in the dream God replied to him, “Yes, I know that you have done this with a clear conscience.^[k] That is why I have kept you^[l] from sinning against me and why^[m] I did not allow you to touch her. ⁷ But now give back the man’s wife. Indeed^[n] he is a prophet^[o] and he will pray for you; thus you will live.^[p] But if you don’t give her back,^[q] know that you will surely die^[r] along with all who belong to you.”

⁸ Early in the morning^[s] Abimelech summoned^[t] all his servants. When he told them about all these things,^[u] they^[v] were terrified. 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?^[w] You have done things to me that should not be done!”^[x] ¹⁰ Then Abimelech asked^[y] Abraham, “What prompted you to do this thing?”^[z]

¹¹ Abraham replied, “Because I thought,^[aa] ‘Surely no one fears God in this place. They will kill me because of^[ab] my wife.’ ¹² What’s more,^[ac] she is indeed my sister, my father’s daughter, but not my mother’s daughter. She became my wife. ¹³ When God made me wander^[ad] from my father’s house, I told her, ‘This is

what you can do to show your loyalty to me:^[ae] Every place we go, say about me, “He is my brother.””

¹⁴ So Abimelech gave^[af] sheep, cattle, and male and female servants to Abraham. He also gave his wife Sarah back to him. ¹⁵ Then Abimelech said, “Look, my land is before you; live wherever you please.”^[ag]

¹⁶ To Sarah he said, “Look, I have given 1,000 pieces of silver^[ah] to your ‘brother.’^[aj] This is compensation for you so that you will stand vindicated before all who are with you.”^[aj]

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. ¹⁸ For the LORD^[ak] had caused infertility to strike every woman^[al] in the household of Abimelech because he took^[am] Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 20:1 **tn** Or “the South [country]”; *Heb* “the land of the Negev.” **sn** *Negev* is the name for the southern desert region in the land of Canaan.
- b. Genesis 20:1 **tn** *Heb* “and he sojournd.”
- c. Genesis 20:3 **tn** *Heb* “came.”
- d. Genesis 20:3 **tn** *Heb* “Look, you [are] dead.” The Hebrew construction uses the particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) with a second person pronominal particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) with by the participle. It is a highly rhetorical expression.
- e. Genesis 20:3 **tn** *Heb* “and she is owned by an owner.” The disjunctive clause is causal or explanatory in this case.
- f. Genesis 20:4 **tn** The Hebrew term translated “Lord” here is אֲדֹנָי (*adonay*).
- g. Genesis 20:4 **tn** Apparently Abimelech assumes that God’s judgment will fall on his entire nation. Some, finding the reference to a nation problematic, prefer to emend the text and read, “Would you really kill someone who is innocent?” See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB), 149.

- h. Genesis 20:5 **tn** *Heb* "he"; the referent has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- i. Genesis 20:5 **tn** *Heb* "and she, even she."
- j. Genesis 20:5 **tn** *Heb* "with the integrity of my heart."
- k. Genesis 20:6 **tn** *Heb* "with the integrity of your heart."
- l. Genesis 20:6 **tn** *Heb* "and I, even I, kept you."
- m. Genesis 20:6 **tn** *Heb* "therefore."
- n. Genesis 20:7 **tn** Or "for," if the particle is understood as causal (as many English translations do) rather than asseverative.
- o. Genesis 20:7 **sn** For a discussion of the term *prophet* see N. Walker, "What is a Nabhi?" *ZAW* 73 (1961): 99-100.
- p. Genesis 20:7 **tn** After the preceding jussive (or imperfect), the imperative with *vav* conjunctive here indicates result. **sn** *He will pray for you that you may live*. Abraham was known as a man of God whose prayer would be effectual. Ironically and sadly, he was also known as a liar.
- q. Genesis 20:7 **tn** *Heb* "if there is not you returning." The suffix on the particle becomes the subject of the negated clause.
- r. Genesis 20:7 **tn** The imperfect is preceded by the infinitive absolute to make the warning emphatic.
- s. Genesis 20:8 **tn** *Heb* "And Abimelech rose early in the morning and he summoned."
- t. Genesis 20:8 **tn** The verb אָרַךְ (*qara'*) followed by the preposition לְ (*lamed*) means "to summon."
- u. Genesis 20:8 **tn** *Heb* "And he spoke all these things in their ears."
- v. Genesis 20:8 **tn** *Heb* "the men." This has been replaced by the pronoun "they" in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- w. Genesis 20:9 **tn** *Heb* "How did I sin against you that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?" The expression "great sin" refers to adultery. For discussion of the cultural background of the passage, see J. J. Rabinowitz, "The Great Sin in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts," *JNES* 18 (1959): 73, and W. L. Moran, "The Scandal of the 'Great Sin' at Ugarit," *JNES* 18 (1959): 280-81.

- x. Genesis 20:9 **tn** *Heb* "Deeds which should not be done you have done to me." The imperfect has an obligatory nuance here.
- y. Genesis 20:10 **tn** *Heb* "And Abimelech said to."
- z. Genesis 20:10 **tn** *Heb* "What did you see that you did this thing?" The question implies that Abraham had some motive for deceiving Abimelech.
- aa. Genesis 20:11 **tn** *Heb* "Because I said."
- bb. Genesis 20:11 **tn** *Heb* "over the matter of."
- cc. Genesis 20:12 **tn** *Heb* "but also."
- dd. Genesis 20:13 **tn** The Hebrew verb is plural. This may be a case of grammatical agreement with the name for God, which is plural in form. However, when this plural name refers to the one true God, accompanying predicates are usually singular in form. Perhaps Abraham is accommodating his speech to Abimelech's polytheistic perspective. (See GKC 463 §145.i.) If so, one should translate, "when the gods made me wander."
- ee. Genesis 20:13 **tn** *Heb* "This is your loyal deed which you can do for me."
- ff. Genesis 20:14 **tn** *Heb* "took and gave."
- gg. Genesis 20:15 **tn** *Heb* "In the [place that is] good in your eyes live!"
- hh. Genesis 20:16 **sn** *A thousand pieces [Heb "shekels"] of silver*. The standards for weighing money varied considerably in the ancient Near East, but the generally accepted weight for the shekel is 11.5 grams (0.4 ounce). This makes the weight of silver here 11.5 kilograms, or 400 ounces (about 25 pounds).
- ii. Genesis 20:16 **sn** *To your 'brother.'* Note the way that the king refers to Abraham. Was he being sarcastic? It was surely a rebuke to Sarah. What is amazing is how patient this king was. It is proof that the fear of God was in that place, contrary to what Abraham believed (see v. 11).
- jj. Genesis 20:16 **tn** *Heb* "Look, it is for you a covering of the eyes, for all who are with you, and with all, and you are set right." The exact meaning of the statement is unclear. Apparently it means that the gift

of money somehow exonerates her in other people's eyes. They will not look on her as compromised (see G. J. Wenham, *Genesis* [WBC], 2:74).

- kk. Genesis 20:18 **tn** In the Hebrew text the clause begins with "because."
- ll. Genesis 20:18 **tn** *Heb* had completely closed up every womb." In the Hebrew text infinitive absolute precedes the finite verb for emphasis.**sn** *The LORD had closed up every womb*. This fact indicates that Sarah was in Abimelech's household for weeks or months before the dream revelation was given (20:6-7). No one in his household could have children after Sarah arrived on the scene.
- mm. Genesis 20:18 **tn** *Heb* "because of the matter of." The words "he took" are used in the translation for clarity.

Questions to Consider

1. When have you repeated the same mistake twice?
2. Try this group exercise. Make two statements about yourself: One is true the other is false. Then have the others in the group guess which statement is true and which is false.
3. Why did Abraham relapse and repeat this lie about Sarah being his sister? [see 12.13]
4. How does God remain faithful to the covenant he made with Abraham?
5. Who is the hero of this story?
6. At what points can you identify with Abraham in this story: a] his all too human relapse?? b] his repeated lie? c] his unwitting test of God's promise?
7. Who in your life is, or has been, an "Abimelech" – one who bravely sets you straight?
8. Where might God be calling you to be an Abimelech for someone else?