

Abraham 9 - God Is Faithful and Just to Forgive

We recall in Genesis chapter 12 how Abraham's trust in God had faltered at the beginning of his spiritual journey. When he went down to Egypt because of food shortage, Abraham ended up allowing the Pharaoh to try to take Sarah for a wife. God blocked Pharaoh from taking her to wife and reproved Abraham. We are not so surprised of how Abraham made his mistake since it was so early in his spiritual growth. In Genesis 20, we are faced with a similar situation where Abimelech goes to take Sarah for a wife but Abraham does not raise any objection. This is very baffling because Abraham has had so many great spiritual experiences since chapter 12. *Again* we see his problem of trusting God. Since we have already looked at the problem of trust, we're not going to examine that today. Instead, we are going to examine another lesson from this chapter. First, let's get some insights on what is happening here.

1. A Satanic plot

Gen 20:1-2 And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

2And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She *is* my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

What is amazing is that Abraham could have made this mistake a second time. What is even more amazing is God's grace in working with Abraham. There are some things that we go through where we might need some reminders, but on the big lessons, there is no reason to fall back into complacency. At first glance, this appears to only be a repeat of Abraham's lack of trust. However, in this setting we want to take notice of a little bit more.

First of all, Abraham had been told by God to go up and down through the

land back in chapter 13.

Gen 13:14-17 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered.

17Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

He was really not unjust in going here as he had been before in going down to Egypt.

The second thing that is easily missed is Sarah's possible condition. Take notice that in chapter 17 Abraham was 99 years old when God promised him a son that would come from him and Sarah.

Gen 17:1,15-17 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

15And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall* her name *be*.

16And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother* of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

17Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall *a child* be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

He was told that at that time next year he was going to have a child. Then

comes the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah In chapter 18. In Genesis 21:5, we see that Abraham is 100 when Isaac is born. If you do the math, there is not a large window of time for Sarah to have conceived and it is possible for Sarah to have conceived during this time period, It is possible she was actually expecting when Abimelech sought to take her as his wife. Had Abimelech been successful in taking her, it could have looked like the promised child she was to bear was not of Abraham. At the very least, if Abimelech had taken her it would have interfered with God's promise to Abraham. God's action against Abimelech might seem disproportionate when compared to what happened to Pharaoh.

Gen 20:3-8,18 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife.

4But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

5Said he not unto me, She *is* my sister? and she, even she herself said, He *is* my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.

6And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

7Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine.

...

18For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

Neither could it be that only Abimelech was stricken. The plague had to be so large so that there was no question about Abimelech's inclusion. This is why I would call this a Satanic plot. Satan is always on hand to ruin God's work. In this case, doubt would be cast on God's promise and Isaac as a type of Christ. Abimelech might be only a pawn in this situation, but there should be little doubt that Satan was at work. Satan does not need to be lifted up and so he is regularly not mentioned. We know, generally, that Satan is at work. Paul pointed this out to the Thessalonians.

2Thess 2:6-7 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

We are not supposed to be consumed with looking for the devil in everything, but we should be generally aware that the devil is working

Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

2Cor 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

We remember that Satan was present to ruin Job, though Job had no knowledge of this until later. We remember that Satan worked to destroy Christ through Herod who sought to kill Jesus when He was an infant. When you are at odds with a brother, it might or might not be demonic forces directly at work. At the very least, you know that you are playing into the hand of the devil. Although Abraham was dealing with trust issues, you can be sure this was part of something larger at hand.

2. The faithfulness of God

Satan was at work, but God who is greater was at work also. I find it amazing that Abraham could have made this mistake a second time. However, what is even more amazing on this occasion is God's grace.

Abraham was not innocent. There was no reason for Abraham to be afraid. He had mustered an army and attacked seven kings and roundly defeated them. Also, Abimelech pointed out to him that there was no reason that he should have been afraid of *him*. He asked Abraham if he had ever seen someone killing a man and taking his wife amongst his people. This was simply not something they were known for.

Gen 20:9-10 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.

10And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?

The application I want to focus on, then, is not Abraham's trust issue. Instead, what I would like to bring to light is God's faithfulness to forgive. *This* is the lesson that we need to make sure of from this chapter.

1John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God could have expressed being fed up with Abraham and raising up someone else to the subject of God's Work. That would be just. But God is also just to give grace, which means that His forgiveness is the righteous thing to do because it fits with God's plan and God's nature. God was still willing to

work with Abraham. Sometimes we think, "Oh no, I can't be used anymore because I have messed up again." But God is faithful to His nature to redeem men and situations if they will repent. Consider the 10 brothers of Joseph, Samson, David, Paul, Mark. The Bible is full of people who were people and did what people do – fail God. And God is *faithful* to mankind to forgive and use people as they turn to Him.

Do you feel that you are ruined and can't be used by God? That could border on blasphemy against God, His power, His character, and His glory.

2Cor 12:9-10 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Think of the great lesson of the Prodigal Son and the power of his father to forgive him. God *will* get the glory out of your life, you just want it to be in the way where He takes you along with Him, not because of His judgment on you. There were also the Pharaohs, Judases, Demases, and others who remained in their sin and God used them in a different way for His glory. That way was at their expense. It is better to go to God for forgiveness, but you have to receive it.

There is a word of caution here. Because Paul preached the grace of God, some slanderously reported that he was preaching that people should feel free to live a life of licentiousness so that good could come. He indicated that such teaching was damnable.

Rom 3:8 And not *rather*, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us

do evil, that good may come?
whose damnation is just.

The caution here is that we should not expect that there will be *no* consequences. Some of them could be extreme. It could be that God might take you home early.

1Cor 11:29-31 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. **[are dead]**

31For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

We might be left here on earth but our service will be affected, such as when David committed adultery.

2Sam 12:10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

It might be the loss of an opportunity to share the Gospel.

Prov 18:19 A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city: and *their* contentions *are* like the bars of a castle.

There are certain disqualifications for serving in ordained ministry.

The point that needs to be emphasized, though, is that even when you might feel like you are worthless and can't be used at all, God will still use you. You don't get to quit God.

3. An inescapable responsibility

In the end, Abraham was called upon to bless Abimelech. Abimelech responded well to a dream from God where he was warned.

Gen 20:3-8 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife.

4But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

5Said he not unto me, She *is* my sister? and she, even she herself said, He *is* my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.

6And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

7Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine.

8Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.

Abimelech was favorably disposed towards Abraham after all was said and done.

Gen 20:14-16 And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and m e n s e r v a n t s , and womenservants, and gave *them* unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

15And Abimelech said, Behold, my land *is* before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

16And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand *pieces* of silver: behold, he *is* to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that *are* with thee, and with all *other*: thus she

was reproved.

He encouraged Abraham to roam freely through the land and gave Abraham an offering of 1000 pieces of silver. It is not clear whether he is making this offering in order to get Abraham to pray for him, but given his attitude in these verses it would be appropriate for him to appreciate the blessing that Abraham pronounced upon him.

Gen 20:17-18 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare *children*.

18For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

After all that Abraham had caused Abimelech to go through, it would seem that at least praying for him was the socially proper thing to do. Abimelech had been very generous to Abraham. The least Abraham could do would be to pray for the curse to be lifted. But, what Abraham does *not* do is also very significant. It would seem to be more in our nature to just try to slink away an embarrassment, but he did not do this. Or, perhaps he could have effusively apologized to Abimelech. This would be consistent with someone who has compromised his testimony, but that is not part of the record. Instead, what he *did* was not what we would expect. It would be difficult for someone so compromised to then act in a way befitting a representative of God. It must have taken a measure of humility on Abraham's part before God and Abimelech to stand up and fulfill his calling. For a child of God, our own sin and embarrassment should not destroy us from our responsibilities before God. This is why I call this an inescapable responsibility. No matter how we might feel, what people might think, we are bearers of the truth.

Rom 1:14-15 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

1Cor 9:16-17 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

17For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation *of the gospel* is committed unto me.

We have a debt of responsibility before men which must outweigh anything that we think about ourselves. We are stewards of the mysteries of God.

1Cor 4:1-2 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

We have a holy obligation before God to carry out our stewardship and the responsibility that God has given us to share the Gospel. I don't like to encourage anyone to presume and take for granted God's forgiveness.

Rom 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

It is not as though you should count on God's grace in a way that you permit yourself to sin.

On the other hand, what I would like to emphasize is that when you have beating yourself bloody and you lie broken on the ground because of your sin, if someone approaches you and wants to hear the gospel, *don't you dare*

hold back. Even though you might have much to be ashamed of yourself, never be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

Luke 9:25-26 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

26For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father's, and of the holy angels.

It is not that it is OK to fall and just go back to serving God. Someone's sin doesn't relieve him of his responsibility to serve Him. You don't get to say, "I sinned so I might as well give up and give myself over to sinning because I am ruined."

Our message to the lost is that there is nothing so great that you have done that you can't receive God's grace to become His child. Sometimes people think that they cannot hope to receive that grace because they know themselves and know that they are likely to sin again. When Jesus died, for you, He knew what your future was going to be like and that is why He died for you. He knew that if your salvation depended on how good *you* were going to be then there *would* be no hope for you. But your salvation depended on how good *He* is and He was faithful and just to forgive you because of *His* goodness.

God is gracious and just and faithful to forgive. By all means, serve Him in fear not taking Him for granted. But, know that He is anxious to pick you up, dust you off, and set you back to work. As you learn to love Him and His work, your temptations will decrease and He *will* use you. We don't know what stumblings lie ahead for you and I pray that you will be spared of those times. But, let me challenge you to move forward for God. Satan might be plotting against you and trying to use you. Instead, turn to God and let Him use you for His glory in whatever way He will.

1. A Satanic plot – Gen 20:1-2, 13:14-17, 17:1,15-17 , 20:3-8,18, 2Thess 2:6-7, Eph 6:11, 2Cor 2:11
2. The faithfulness of God – Gen 20:9-10, 1John 1:8-9, 2Cor 12:9-10, Rom 3:8, 1Cor 11:29-31, 2Sam 12:10, Prov 18:19
3. An inescapable responsibility – Gen 20:3-8, 20:14-16, 20:17-18, Rom 1:14-15, 1Cor 9:16-17, 4:1-2, Rom 6:1-2, Luke 9:25-26