

# On the Beginning

## 23. Abimelech

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 20

When God rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham and Sarah were living in “*the plain of Mamre*” (Genesis 13: 8-18, 14:13, 18:1). But not long after this, they moved to Gerar to the south and west. Gerar was a big city in those days, occupied by Philistines. Although Genesis 20 never identifies the people there as Philistines, later Genesis 26 does. We are introduced to the Philistines in Genesis 10, where they are identified as a people descended from Mizraim, son of Ham (vs. 6-14). Genesis 21 does say that Abimelech lived in “*the land of the Philistines*” (v. 32), and he is the main subject of Chapter 20. Although the main Philistine presence in Canaan-land occurred at and beyond the time of Moses (centuries after Abraham), a certain number of them settled near the seashore of that country much earlier. We think they were originally from Crete (Caphtor – Jeremiah 47:4). When Joshua and the Israelites were conquering land from the Canaanite’s, the Philistines were striving to conquer the same territory. This is why they were at war with Israel in the days of Joshua, the judges, and the early kings. But Abraham met them at a much quieter time. Yet his contact with them was not a good experience either for them or for him.

### 1. Still Lying.

The opening verses of Genesis 20 tell us that Abraham and Sarah were still telling the lie (v.2) that got them into so much trouble down in Egypt (Genesis 12: 10-20). Actually, verse 12 reveals that it was really a half-truth, since Sarah was Abraham’s half-sister! We wonder how the father of the faithful could fail in his faith so completely after seeing God come through for him in so many ways. More than likely, Sarah was already miraculously pregnant. God had wrought a great victory for Abraham at Sodom (Chapter 14), as well as a great destruction there later which Abraham had seen (Chapter 19). In Genesis 15:6 and in other places, the faith of the patriarch had seemed so strong! Had he not learned the lesson God was teaching him in Egypt? Apparently not! They were still claiming to be brother and sister instead of husband and wife (v.13 – Genesis 12:11-13). We might be angry at Abraham except for how prone we are ourselves to lapse back into sin and unbelief. Don’t ever think that the weaknesses of your past cannot return. Trust in the power of the Lord every day to keep you obedient, upright, and faithful.

### 2. A Righteous nation.

Why did Abimelech, King of Gerar, want Sarah? Wasn’t she ninety years old (See Genesis 17:17)? Possibly the miracle that allowed Sarah to conceive also restored some of her youth and beauty. Remember that she was “*a fair woman to look upon*” when she was sixty-five years old (Genesis 12:11). Some scholars think that Abimelech (which was probably the king’s title, rather than his personal name) wanted to take Sarah as a wife in order to establish an alliance with her “brother,” who was a wealthy man. This kind of thing was done in those days. But God kept Abimelech from actually marrying Sarah or

consummating the marriage (vs. 2-7). Notice some strange things that are said about this heathen ruler.

- A. “*God came*” to him (v.3)
- B. His was “*a righteous nation*” (v. 4).
- C. He acted “*in the integrity*” of his heart (vs. 5&6).
- D. God “*withheld*” him “*from sinning*” (v. 6).

In several ways, God’s friend Abraham was in the wrong in this situation, and a Philistine was in the right! See what Abraham said in trying to explain his actions to Abimelech (vs. 11-13)

His divine call he described as God causing him to wander from home. He called Sarah’s willingness to go along with his lying scheme a “*kindness*” she did for him. Abraham’s attitude and actions cannot be defended. He was wrong.

Whenever God’s servants stray in heart or in action from the right path, the effect of their lives is for bad rather than for good. See how shocked and dismayed Abimelech was! How terrible it is when we disappoint and wrong the heathen around us.

3. Abraham **prayed**.

Even though he was misbehaving, Abraham was God’s servant – His prophet according to verse 7. And God was going to heal the house of Abimelech only in answer to Abraham’s prayer. Apparently, the Lord afflicted the king and his household with a deadly disease of some kind which also prevented conception (Look at verses 3, 7, and 18). There was danger that the whole nation might die of this plague (v.4) if Abimelech had touched Sarah. But the plague would be gone if Abraham would pray (vs. 7 and 17). It is an amazing thing that there are things God will do if His servant prays, but will not do if he doesn’t! Prayer is an important practice. Notice also that Abimelech had to make right the wrong he had done (although ignorantly) before the prayer would be answered (v. 7 – See Matthew 5:23-24 and Mark 11:25).

4. Sarah **Reproved**.

The things that Abimelech said to Abraham and Sarah were certainly a rebuke to them for their unbelief and sin. Read them again in Genesis 20:9-16. Notice especially how he “*reproved*” Sarah (v. 16). He admonished her to appreciate her husband and stay faithful to him. Maybe he was implying that in agreeing to lie about their relationship, Sarah was opening a door to be unfaithful. Whatever her true motivation was, Sarah would not have been right to agree with her husband about this charade. She was right to submit to his decision. See this in I Peter 3:1-6. He was responsible for the wrong of his decision, but she was right to submit to him. However, she would have been wrong to agree in her heart with the sinful scheme. See this in Acts 5:1-10. Sapphira was “*privy to*” her husband’s sinful scheme, and she paid for it! Sometimes Christian women hide their own wickedness behind the wrong decisions of their husbands, claiming to be merely subject to them. But God knows every heart.

