

Introduction

Abraham's ministry is described in verse seven: "...*he is a prophet, and he will pray for you...*" Prophecy is speaking to men and women about God; prayer is speaking to God about men and women. Abraham at first failed on account of his fear, but later was faithful to his ministry.

Prayer and prophecy describe *your* ministry as well! You are called upon to speak to God about men and women, and to speak to men and women about God.

^ Prayer

Prayer is, of course, more than speaking to God about men and women. It is communicating with and communing with your Father in heaven through His Son, Jesus Christ. You are called upon, though, to intercede for others - to speak to God about them.

%o Prophecy

You may think I've gone too far by suggesting that you are to "prophecy." Let me explain. To "prophecy" simply means "to speak for God," or "to speak forth the Word of God." The Bible speaks of the Office of Prophet, the Gift of Prophecy, *and* of every believer speaking for God or speaking forth the Word of God.

= Certain individuals in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are identified as Prophets. It was an office of leadership and responsibility. I said it "was" an office because the New Testament clearly indicates that once the Apostles and Prophets laid the foundation of the Church, their unique office ceased and the responsibility for leadership now rests in Pastor-Teachers and Evangelists.

= The supernatural Gift of Prophecy is still given to individual members of the Church. You can read all about it especially in First Corinthians Fourteen. As long as prophecy agrees with the completed revelation of Scripture we receive it as a message of edification, exhortation, and encouragement.

= In a different but no less important sense, *every* believer is to speak for God and to speak forth the Word of God. The Apostle Peter, writing to every believer, says, (1 Peter 4:11) "If anyone speaks, *let him speak as the oracles of God.*" He is reminding you that all of your speech represents God to men and women - *it is speaking for God!* Then also he says, (2 Peter 1:19) "We have also a more sure word of prophecy..." In other words, God's written Word is inherently prophetic! When you share the Word, you are sharing God's written prophecy - *speaking forth the Word of God!*

You don't hold the Office of a Prophet...You may not have been given the Gift of Prophecy...But you do speak for God and you do speak forth God's Word.

Like Abraham, then, you are to be faithful to pray and to prophesy. Abraham, before Abimelech, at first failed on account of fear.

Do you ever fail on account of fear? Is there some "Abimelech" before whom you have failed on account of fear? This account in Genesis Twenty will encourage your faithfulness!

#1 God Is Greater Than Your Failures
To Pray And To Prophesy
(v1-8)

#2 God Is Gracious In Your Fears
To Pray And To Prophesy
(v9-16)

#3 God Is Glorified By Your Faithfulness
To Pray And To Prophesy
(v17-18)

#1 God Is Greater Than Your Failures
To Pray And To Prophesy
(v1-8)

I don't want to suggest that your failures are insignificant or to be ignored. I don't want to give the impression that your failures are good because they reveal the greatness of God. It is simply true that you and I fail, and it is profoundly true that God is greater than your failures.

A.W. Pink writes,

F.W. Grant writes,

Genesis 20:1 And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar.

It is interesting to note that not all the cities were as Sodom and Gomorrah. As a believer you are to be separate from worldliness, but are left in the world as God's representative.

Genesis 20:2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She *is* my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

Sarah is ninety years old! Why did Abimelech send and take her? Some say it was political; Abraham was a powerful man and Abimelech, as a gesture of goodwill, desired to marry his sister to maintain peaceful relations. Others suggest that God rejuvenated Sarah in such a way that she was still strikingly beautiful.

I say the Apostle Peter's answer is the best. Talking about Sarah as a model for Christian women and wives, in 1 Peter 3:3-6 he says,

"Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel; rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror."

It is inner beauty that made Sarah attractive. She may have been physically attractive as well, but that is secondary. As Proverbs 31:30 states, "Charm *is* deceitful and beauty *is* passing, But a woman *who* fears the LORD, she shall be praised." Any Christian woman can be as attractive as Sarah, at any age. In fact, biblically, age *enhances* beauty if you're growing in the Lord!

The same is true of you men. Proverbs 16:31, "The hoary head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it be found in the way of righteousness."

Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man's wife."

God had afflicted Abimelech with a life threatening illness on account of his taking Sarah. You can't accuse God of cruelty - Abimelech is a sinner, whether he thinks so or not, and God is merciful to reveal his sin to him so he can repent.

The Lord speaks to him on his deathbed...

Genesis 20:4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?"

Abimelech's plight has a contemporary application to leaders and their nations. Today there is a debate over whether or not a politician's personal sexual infidelities should have any effect on his or her leadership. God was going to judge the entire nation Abimelech was responsible to lead because of his ignorant potential adultery! If ignorant potential adultery is a serious offense before God, how much more willful actual adultery? Our own leaders are putting this nation in jeopardy.

Genesis 20:5 "Did he not say to me, 'She *is* my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He *is* my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."

Abimelech appealed to his personal integrity. He was innocent by his own laws but guilty by God's Laws. Today we try to change biblically based civil laws in order to legalize immorality. God's laws don't change!

Genesis 20:6 And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

The Lord acknowledged Abimelech's relative integrity but still held him accountable to a higher standard. Notice God doesn't say Abimelech is "innocent."

Here at the end of verse six is a word of comfort. God withheld Abimelech from sinning against Sarah. Whatever you go through at the hands of sinners on earth is carefully scrutinized before God's throne in heaven.

Genesis 20:7 "Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours."

Genesis 20:8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid.

Abimelech had been convicted of sin. He had been shown his own insufficient righteousness. He was warned of coming judgment. Now he had a decision to make.

It's always that way in God's dealings with sinners! God the Holy Spirit is said to convict men and women of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Then they have a decision to make.

Back in Genesis Twelve we pointed out that Abraham was called to be a blessing to all the nations of the world. Here he again fails to carry out that ministry. He ought to have been praying for Abimelech and sharing God's prophetic Word. Instead he was afraid and involved in deceit. Abraham could be thankful that God was greater than his failure with Abimelech.

You can be thankful that God is greater than *your* failures to pray and to prophesy!

#2 God Is Gracious In Your Fears
To Pray And To Prophecy
(v9-16)

Again I would point out that you shouldn't purposely fail so that God's grace might abound. It is wonderfully true, though, that in your failure God's grace *does* abound to you! It abounds to Abraham in two ways: Through Reproof and Through Restoration.

= God's Grace Abounds Through Reproof

Genesis 20:9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done."

Genesis 20:10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

Abimelech asks an important question: "What did you have in view?"
What you have in view, or in mind, will direct your behavior.

Genesis 20:11 And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.

Genesis 20:12 "But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

Genesis 20:13 "And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He *is* my brother.'" "

A half-truth is a whole lie. Abraham and Sarah tried to overcome their fear of men by lying; the result was the overthrow of their faith. Unbiblical strategies for dealing with spiritual problems always compromise the truth. Courage is not a feeling; it is obedience in the face of your fear!

God was gracious to reprove Abraham. Perhaps we would more easily receive reproof if we understood that it was from God's abounding grace that it comes to us! You think that it is coming from your spouse, or your spiritual leaders, or from some unbeliever. They are only the instrument. God is the source.

= God's Grace Abounds Through Restoration

Genesis 20:14 Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him.

Genesis 20:15 And Abimelech said, "See, my land *is* before you; dwell where it pleases you."

Genesis 20:16 Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who *are* with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.

Before speaking of restoration, there is an interesting insight in verse sixteen. Your King James Bible translates the Hebrew words this way:

Genesis 20:16 And 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 reprov'd.

Abimelech provides Abraham and Sarah with a study on marriage! The husband is to be "a covering of the eyes" of his wife. Why do you cover someone's eyes?

v You cover someone's eyes when you are about to surprise them...

v You cover someone's eyes when you want to keep them safe from being offended at something...

The husband's role is to keep marriage safe and surprising! This spills over into the family - "unto all that are with thee" - and is observed as a pattern for others looking on - "and with all other."

God restored Abraham and Sarah, despite their failure. In some ways they were even better off than before their failure! Should you fail so grace might abound? No - God forbid! But grace does abound when you return from failure to faithfulness.

#3 God Is Glorified By Your Faithfulness To Pray And To Prophecy (v17-18)

Genesis 20:17 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children*;

Genesis 20:18 for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Not only had Abimelech been afflicted, but all the women of his household had become barren. Perhaps this was because God was about to allow Sarah to become pregnant by Abraham, bearing Isaac - who would be the ancestor of Jesus Christ, the promised Savior of the world. God wanted to make it clear that Isaac was not the child of Abimelech! Even though Abimelech was supernaturally restrained from having sex with her, their relationship gave the appearance of evil. No one would believe that they hadn't slept together! So God made it clear to everyone that Isaac was no child of adultery.

Avoid all appearance of evil and you will find it easier to avert the allurement of evil.

Abraham now is faithful to pray and, undoubtedly, share God's prophetic word with Abimelech. God is glorified and brings life to Abimelech's household - God spares their lives and brings new life.

It's a picture for us of what, in the spiritual realm, prayer and prophecy accomplish. They bring newness of life to dead sinners! God is glorified as men, women, and children are changed through their contact with His Word, delivered to them by His chosen instruments - you and I.

Conclusion

The New Testament Book of Romans presents, perhaps more than any other book, the grace of God. Some have called Romans "The Gospel of Grace." As he was writing about grace Paul found it necessary to use the phrase "God forbid" ten times. For example, after writing in chapter five about the abundant supply of God's grace when you sin, he immediately says in chapter six,

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid..."

Whenever you share about God's greatness and graciousness in your fears and failures there is a tendency to wonder if you are glorying in them. The answer of every sincere believer is, "God forbid!" God is glorified in your faithfulness.

Nevertheless it edifies me to know God is greater than my failures and that God is gracious in my fears. It also encourages me to be even more faithful. I trust it will do the same for you.