

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 20:1-18

Topic

Abraham once again asks Sarah to tell everyone she is his sister

Title

“Sister Act 2 - Back to Old Habits”

Introduction

Dilbert is a comic strip known for its satirical office humor. Its creator, Scott Adams, asked the readers of his blog to “describe your own job in one sentence, preferably in a humorously derogatory way.”

Here are a few of the responses he received. Listen to the description then think (to yourself) what the job might be.

- Be a human napkin: Stay-at-home mother of three
- Talk in other people’s sleep: College Professor
- Copy and paste the Internet: Student
- Run away and call the police: Security Guard
- Make food that is just as healthy before it goes in your body as when it comes back out: Fast Food Employee

We encounter a spiritual job description in our text. It’s in verse seven where God says to Abimelech, “[Abraham] is a **prophet**, and he will **pray** for you.”

- As a prophet Abraham was to speak to men about God.
- As one who prayed Abraham was to speak to God about men.

The twist is that initially Abraham utterly fails to pray or to prophesy. God sticks with him and Abraham eventually carries out his assignment.

This has application for us. Part of **our** 'job description' as Christians is to pray and to prophesy. Like Abraham, we can and we do fail. But God sticks with us and we can be renewed to faithfulness.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Is Gracious In Your Failures To Pray & To Prophecy, and #2 God Is Glorified In Your Faithfulness To Pray & To Prophecy.

#1 God Is Gracious In
Your Failures To Pray & To Prophecy
(v1-8)

Prayer is *communicating* with and *communing* with God. An important aspect of prayer is to intercede for others - to speak to God about them. In his farewell speech the prophet Samuel said to the Israelites, "...far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you..." (First Samuel 12:23). It was part of his job description as a prophet.

You may think I've gone too far by suggesting that *you* are to "prophesy." To "prophesy" means *to speak for God, or to speak forth the Word of God*. The Bible describes the office of prophet, the gift of prophecy, and it describes 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, elders, and deacons.
- 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 the 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, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1Peter 4:11). He is reminding you that all of your speech represents God to men and women - it is speaking *for* God. Then he says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy..." (2Peter 1:19). 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 can'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.**

Let's see how Abraham handled his assignment to pray and to prophesy.

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

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

At the very beginning of his walk with the Lord Abraham had told this same lie while in Egypt. The Pharaoh, thinking Sarah was his sister, took her in to his harem with the intention of marrying her. Now Abimelech does likewise.

By the way, just how attractive *was* Sarah? We usually think of a trophy wife as being the very young counterpart to an older man. Sarah was ninety years old when Abimelech went weak in the knees for her.

Abraham's failure tells us a few things.

- One thing it tells us is that as long as we are in these bodies we will contend with the flesh. By the 'flesh' I mean that inclination, that influence, I find still at work in my unredeemed body that prompts me to yield myself to sin.
- Another thing Abraham's failure tells us is that there can be particular sins I am more susceptible to than others. I should therefore know my

weaknesses and strategize how to avoid putting myself into situations that might cause me to stumble.

- Another thing I see here is that spiritual maturity does not come automatically with age. Abraham had walked with God for a quarter century but was still at square one in his paranoia about being killed for Sarah.

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 says to him, "you are a dead man." We take that to mean God was going to kill him. Indeed, in a few verses we see that God had afflicted him in some way. But in a spiritual sense "you are a dead man" is simply the declaration of a truth. **Abimelech was *already* a dead man.**

If you are not a believer God has said to **you**, at to everyone else, "you are a dead man." In the New Testament, in the Book of Ephesians, God explains that you were born dead in trespasses and sins. You are born physically alive and soulishly active, but you are born spiritually dead.

You can, however, be born-again, born spiritually, by receiving Jesus Christ.

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

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 thought he and his nation were "righteous." He claimed to have "integrity" and pointed to his "innocence."

His integrity and innocence among men, though commendable, did not render him justified before God. These works of human righteousness were of no eternal value. He must be declared "righteous" by God if he was to be saved.

“Abimelech,” by the way, is a title, like Pharaoh. He is here representing his nation. What was true of him was true of them.

You could therefore say that Abraham had been sent to Abimelech, to the people of Gerar, to reveal the grace of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He was God’s missionary to them. And it wasn’t a bad assignment because the people of Gerar were actually pretty good compared to their neighbors.

Abraham failed miserably in his mission. He brought Abimelech and his people under even greater condemnation.

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.

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.

Was this the same “dream”? I’m not sure. It could be that Abimelech had to wait a night or two before he got this answer.

I know when I got saved there was a period of time, a couple days I think, that I was in an absolute mental funk about my sin and need for salvation. It was all I could think about. It was what the Bible calls conviction.

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 sent to convict men and women of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Then they have a decision to make.

*Do **you** have a decision to make?*

Although God can use dreams or whatever means He so desires, He has chosen in this church age to entrust the good news about salvation in Jesus Christ to you and I who have believed on Him for salvation. We are sent to pray for laborers to go out into the harvest to speak the prophetic Word to them.

Abraham failed. He not only kept quiet about God, he lied and concealed his own identity as a believer. So did Sarah.

Do you and I ever fail, keeping quiet or even concealing our true identity? Our reluctant but honest answer is, "Yes!"

The solution isn't to try harder or make a bunch of promises to God. It is to ask for His help. You see, Jesus told His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit upon them, to baptize them, giving them the power they needed to be bold witnesses for Him. In another place (Luke 11) He encouraged believers to ask and seek and knock for the gift of the Holy Spirit, promising that God would not withhold Him from you.

If you have been failing in your witness for Christ then ask Him for the help He promised and then, by faith, believe He has given you His Spirit.

#2 God Is Glorified In
Your Faithfulness To Pray & To Prophecy
(v9-18)

Any CEO worth his salt would have fired Abraham. But God held him out to Abimelech as His go-to guy in Gerar.

Simultaneously, God used Abimelech to reprove Abraham.

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?"

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 nonbeliever. They are only the instrument. God is the source.

Abimelech's question, "what did you have in view?," is insightful. The thing Abraham had set his "view" upon was his own safety and longevity.

He ought to have set his view upon Abimelech's lost condition.

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." ' ' "

Abraham feared what man could do to him when he ought to have feared what God must do to Abimelech and his nation should they die apart from Christ. Often it is some form of self-preservation that keeps us quiet.

Abraham indicated that *everywhere* they went they were in the habit of playing this sister act. It is what biblical counselors would call a 'life-dominating sin.'

These great men and women of the Bible, they were of like passions with us. Be encouraged that God loves you every bit as much as He does them, and that there are no 'super-saints,' only saints.

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."

One reason I think Abimelech got saved was his generosity towards Abraham and Sarah. To the couple that had almost cost him his life and the destruction of his nation he extended generous hospitality. He gave them, as it were, the key to the city. Abimelech was giving out of grace to those who had wronged him. It was a God-thing.

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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.

There is a ton of disagreement as to how to properly translate verse sixteen. With some translations it reads as a comfort to Sarah; with others, it reads as a rebuke to her. In some - like the NKJV I just read - it sounds like *both* a comfort and a rebuke.

Let me give it to you in the KJV.

Genesis 20:16 (KJV) 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 reproved.

That last word, "reproved," can mean *to show to be right* or *to vindicate*. I think Abimelech was being used by God to exonerate Sarah because, even though she went along with this, it was her husband who was ultimately responsible.

Seeing it that way we can find a sweet marriage devotional in this verse. The husband is to be "a covering of the eyes" of his wife. What are the positive reasons why you cover someone's eyes?

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

We might note, too, that when Abraham was blowing it, Sarah's eyes were covered in a different and negative way. She was, essentially, kidnapped.

Husbands take heed and take heart!

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.

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.

God wanted to make it clear that when Isaac was born, he was *not* the child of Abimelech! Even though Abimelech was supernaturally restrained from having sex with her, their relationship might give 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. By closing up all the wombs.

Abraham “prayed” for the first time recorded in this chapter. I say he also undoubtedly shared with Abimelech many things about the Lord. Like, for example, how God had judged Sodom and Gomorrah. We would say then that, in the end, he prayed and he prophesied.

It's a picture for us of what, in the spiritual realm, prayer and prophecy accomplish. *They bring new birth 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.

As you re-enter the places in the world you have been strategically placed by God, consider these two things:

1. God the Holy Spirit is available, by faith, if you will ask, seek, and knock believing God is a good heavenly Father Who does not withhold the Spirit from you.
2. Pray for those with whom you have contact and then look for opportunities to talk to them about God.