

Genesis 20

April 7, 2024



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

God remains true to His character, even when we allow difficult circumstances to determine ours.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What comes to mind when you think of the word faith?

How does a biblical understanding of faith differ from our culture's understanding of faith?

Which is more important: the quality of a person's faith or the object of his or her faith? What about the source of a person's faith? Why are all of these essential?

What keeps a boat at dock? The answer is not the boat itself, but what is attached to the boat. A rope connected to a dock (or anchor) preserves the boat's location. For the boat not to drift out to the sea, the boat must stay connected to both the rope and the



dock. The quality of the rope matters since the boat will be lost if it breaks. The dock's durability matters as well. If not suited to its environment, the dock would nullify the utility of the rope. What is a rope tied to a boat without a dock, after all? Similarly, faith is like a rope that connects us to Christ. To stay connected, it needs to be of a certain quality. Our concern is not the durability of God as the object of our faith: He is the dock that can endure any and all things. God is faithful in all circumstances, even when we drift.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 20:1-7.

We read that Abraham lied about Sarah at the outset of his arrival in Gerar. What does this lie teach you about Abraham's faith in God in this circumstance?

How does Genesis 20:1-7 remind us of previous events in Abraham's life? What are some dissimilar details between the events described in this passage, and those describing Abraham's deception earlier in Genesis 12:10-20?

Does it seem strange to you that God appeared to Abimelech to bring the truth to light instead of to Abraham? Explain.

Abraham was a man of great faith, yet here again he was willing to sacrifice his wife to spare his own life. Relating this story to our introductory analogy of a boat at dock, Abraham's faith was, at times, adrift. He treated Sarah like an object to be bartered instead of the spouse God had given him to love and care for. Sarah did what Abraham asked, but God continued to protect Sarah. He was faithful to her when her husband was not.

Despite Abraham's sin, how do we see God continuing to protect Abraham as well as Sarah and even Abimelech? What does this teach us about God's nature?

When God appeared to Abimelech in a dream, He was protecting Abraham and Sarah. God still cared about Abraham even when Abraham showed a disregard for God. His purpose in Abraham's life still mattered. God was faithful to do what He promised, even when Abraham's conduct went against God. Thankfully for us, the promises of God are secured not by our faithfulness but by His.

What choice did God give Abimelech? What lesson was God teaching Abimelech in giving Him this choice?



God's promise was to Abraham and Sarah, not Abimelech. Yet God's intervention in this situation included an opportunity for Abimelech to know God and obey His commands in faith.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 20:8-13.

What evidences of faith did Abimelech show in these verses?

Based on his answer to Abimelech, how had Abraham justified his lie?

In what ways are we sometimes tempted to justify sins? Was there any excuse for Abraham's sin that God would accept? Is there any excuse for our sins that God will accept as justified? Explain.

Abimelech and his men expressed fear in God. They understood the consequence of sin against God was death. And Abimelech, unlike many of his contemporaries, acted in faith. Even more, he confronted Abraham about the lie, wondering why God's prophet would disobey God in such a way. All the while, God used the circumstance to teach Abraham, Sarah, and the people of Gerar about His authority and His mercy.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 20:14-18.

What evidences of faith did Abimelech show in these verses?

In what way did Abraham demonstrate repentance?

In what ways did God bless each person involved? Why?

It was not only Abimelech who had stood in danger of disastrous consequence, God had closed the wombs of every person in Abimelech's household. God showed His mercy and grace again. Abraham had sinned, yet God's grace was poured out on everyone. The eyes of each person in the account were opened in greater measure to the character and faithfulness of God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

God was faithful even when Abraham wasn't. Does this mean we are free to live faithlessly? What, then, does it mean for us personally?

How can we help one another choose faith instead of fear?

How can choosing faith in difficulty help others see the glory of our God?



PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Thank God for His faithfulness in our faithlessness. Ask Him to help you walk in full trust and obedience, even in fearful situations.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Abraham:

April 14, 2024 --- Genesis 21



COMMENTARY

Genesis 20

20:1–3. As we read these chapters in Genesis, we think the Canaanite postal service must have struggled keeping track of this wandering nomad. Here again he changes zip codes, moving back south to the Negev. The text gives us no hint why Abraham made this move. We find it disturbing in view of what he had just been through with Sodom and his awareness that the son of promise was due within a year. In chapter 12 he went to Egypt because of the famine, but here no reason for his move is evident.

The Lord preserved Sarah's purity yet still held Abimelech accountable for taking Sarah into his harem. Yet again God intervened with a dream (Gen. 28:12; 31:10–11; 37:5–9; 40:5; 41:1).

20:4–7. Quite possibly Abimelech is not a name at all but a royal title like Pharaoh or Caesar. The name appears again in chapter 26, probably to identify the son or grandson of the Abimelech we encounter here.

But the interesting thing about these verses centers not in God's encounter with Abimelech but in the language that passes between them—words like clear conscience, clean hands, and pray for you. Abimelech was probably as vicious and violent a monarch as the other kings we met earlier in this record of Abraham's life. Abimelech meant, of course, that according to the customs of his land and the culture around him, he had done nothing wrong—and he was correct. Nevertheless, God held him accountable and threatened him with capital punishment.

A passage like this reminds us of Paul's warning in Romans about the importance of natural revelation as a means of understanding God's truth: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen (Rom. 1:18–25).

20:8–10. This threat from God had to be taken seriously. Abimelech brought in all his top people. When they heard the story they were very much afraid. Then Abimelech



asked Abraham three questions. The most important appears in verse 10: What was your reason for doing this?

20:11–13. The three excuses given by Abraham were not reasons at all but rationalization of behavior unbecoming a giant of faith: 1. I was afraid. 2. I only told a half lie. 3. Sarah and I do this quite often.

But the opening line of verse 11 reveals a great deal: There is surely no fear of God in this place. How many times Christians live, work, travel, and go to school in places where there seems to be no fear of God. The word fear here takes on its religious sense. Abimelech did not fear God; he had no idea who God was. But Abraham feared Abimelech because the patriarch knew God well. This kind of fear has often been described as reverential trust that involves commitment and obedience.

20:14–18. By God's grace Abraham received not punishment but plunder. Wherever he went, whatever he did, Abraham stood under God's protection and blessing. Abimelech reacted very much like Pharaoh did except he threw in the land. The word shekel does not appear in the Hebrew text, but translators use it because it describes the most common unit of weight in ancient times.

Verse 18 indicates a portion of the punishment of which we have not yet heard. Back in verse 3 only Abimelech stood in danger; now we learn the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

God's grace covered Abraham's ignorance. He threatened Abimelech, not Abraham. Abimelech needed prayer, and Abraham prayed. Abimelech did wrong, and Abraham was paid. The whole chapter seems off kilter unless we cover it with God's grace. This sin certainly changed Abimelech's view of Abraham, but God's view remained unshaken. He forgave Abraham.

