



The Book of Genesis

Lesson Number 30



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ABP=Apostolic Bible Polygot m(1992); ALT=Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED=Amplified Bible (1965), ABP=Apostolic Bible Polygot with Greek Interlinear (2003); ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), BRENT=Brenton's English Septuagint; CEV=Contemporary English Version (1995); DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV=English Revised Version (1885), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), GENEVA=Geneva Bible (1599), GNB=Good News (1966), GWN=God's Word (1995), IE= International English (1973), ISV=International Standard Version (1967), JPS=Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), LITV= Literal Translation of the Bible (1976), LIVING=Living Bible (1971), MESSAGE=The Message (1993), MKJV= Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY=Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD=Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS=J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT=Bishop's New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), WEB=Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS=William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE=Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862)

----- GREEK LEXICON LEGEND -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = Barclay-Newman, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS: THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, MANKIND, SIN, THE FIRST CHOSEN AND BLESSED NATION, THE FIRST CURSE, THE FIRST PROMISE, AND THE FIRST FAITH.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

Gen 20:1 ¹And 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. ³But 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. ⁹Then 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? ¹¹And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. ¹²And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. ¹⁴And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, 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 removed. ¹⁷So 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." (Genesis 20:1-18)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

While sojourning in Gerar, Abraham having said of Sarah, "She is my sister," Abimelech, king of Gerar, takes

Sarah for his own. In a dream God came and said to Abimelech that he was a dead man, for he had taken another man's wife. However, the king

had not yet come near to Sarah, and thus conversed with the Lord concerning the whole matter. He asked the Lord if He would slay a "righteous

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nation,” providing a full explanation for his conduct, declaring that both Abraham and Sarah had stated she was Abraham’s sister. He then affirmed that the deed was done in integrity and innocence. God responded that He knew this was the case, and had therefore not allowed him to touch Sarah. God told Abimelech if he wanted to live, he should restore her to Abraham. If he failed to do this, he would die. He further told the king that, upon restoring Sarah to Abraham, the patriarch, who was a prophet, would pray for him, in order that he might live. He did this, and he, his wife and household were healed.

CONCERNING THOSE LIVING BEFORE THE GIVING OF THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

Comparatively speaking, there are not many individuals mentioned prior to the giving of the Law. Although it covered a period of 2,500 years (half a century longer than the time of Christ until now), not much is known of

individuals living during that time. Excluding the genealogies, which were not intended to be a commentary on the people themselves, we have records of the following people.

- ➔ **ADAM AND EVE.** Created, sinned, expelled from Garden.
- ➔ **CAIN.** Offered sacrifice to God, which was rejected as well as himself. He murdered his brother and was cursed by God.
- ➔ **ABEL.** Offered a sacrifice that was accepted by God, as well as himself.
- ➔ **SETH.** Begotten after Adam’s own image.
- ➔ **NIMROD.** Great leader and kingdom and city builder.
- ➔ **LAMECH.** First bigamist, and a murderer as well.
- ➔ **ENOC.** Walked with God for three hundred years, and was translated.
- ➔ **NOAH.** Found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and was saved from a global flood with his family in an ark he was instructed to build.
- ➔ **HAM.** Behaved himself uncomely when he saw his naked father. His son, Canaan, was cursed.

whom a considerable part of the Gentiles came.

- ➔ **TERAH.** Father of Abraham, who was an idolater.
- ➔ **JOB.** Supposed to have lived around the time of Abraham. There is a great volume of writing concerning Job thank any other man in human history – and it all focuses around an extraordinary trial, put into motion by God Himself.
- ➔ **ABRAHAM.** Called of God, and the appointed father of those with faith.
- ➔ **SARAH.** Wife of Abraham, through whom the promised heir Isaac was born.
- ➔ **LOT.** Nephew of Abraham, who traveled with him from Ur to Canaan, down into Egypt, and in the return trip from Egypt.
- ➔ **PHARAOH.** Took Abraham’s wife for himself, and was plagued by God for doing so. Gave her back to Abraham when he found out she was his wife.
- ➔ **HAGAR.** Handmaid of Sarah, whom she appointed to bear a child in her behalf, to be Abraham’s promised heir.

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- ➔ **SHEM.** Son of Noah through whom the Messianic seed came.
- ➔ **JAPHATH.** Son of Noah through
- ➔ **ISHMAEL.** Son of Abraham through HAGAR. Rejected as the heir, and eventually expelled from Abraham’s house with his mother.

- ➔ **ISAAC.** Abraham's promised heir, and the progenitor of the Messianic lineage.
- ➔ **ESAU.** Isaac's first born twin son. Was profane, and sold his birthright for a morsel of food.
- ➔ **JACOB.** Esau's twin brother, and the appointed heir of the promise.
- ➔ **JOSEPH.** One of Jacob's sons, sent by God into Egypt to sustain the Israelites, and many others, during an appointed seven year famine.
- ➔ **JOSEPH'S BROTHERS (11).** With Joseph, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- ➔ **PHARAOH.** Recognized the wisdom of Joseph, and exalted him as head over all the land, Pharaoh himself being the only exception.
- ➔ **MOSES' PARENTS.** Amram and Jochebed. Refused to obey Pharaoh's edict to kill all male newborns.
- ➔ **MOSES.** Born during the Egyptian bondage, yet exalted by God to lead the nation out of that bondage. The Law was given by Moses.
- ➔ **MIRIAM.** Moses' sister, who guarded him when an infant, and recommended one of the Hebrew women to wean him, when he was found by Pharaoh's daughter. She was also instrumental in leading Israel out of Egypt.
- ➔ **PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER.** When Moses' mother hid him in an ark, placing him on the Nile River, she found the babe, and took him into her house.
- ➔ **AARON.** Moses' brother, who was his mouthpiece and coworker in the deliverance from Egypt, and the journey to the promised land.
- ➔ **JOSHUA.** Military leader of Israel

under Moses, who also led the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan.

RESPONSES TO TRANSGRESSIONS

There is also the recorded response of God to the following transgressions.

- ➔ **DISOBEDIENCE** (Adam and Eve)
- ➔ **MURDER** (Cain)
- ➔ **VIOLENCE** (The world of Noah's day).
- ➔ **UNITED EFFORTS THAT EXCLUDED GOD** (Babel).
- ➔ **SODOMY** (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim).
- ➔ **ATTEMPT TO TAKE ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE** (Pharaoh and Abimelech).

RESPONSES OF DIVINE FAVOR

The following recorded instances reveal God's favor and reception of people and things done.

- ➔ **A SACRIFICE MADE BY FAITH** (Abel).
- ➔ **A GODLY LIFE** (Noah).
- ➔ **BELIEVING GOD** (Abraham).

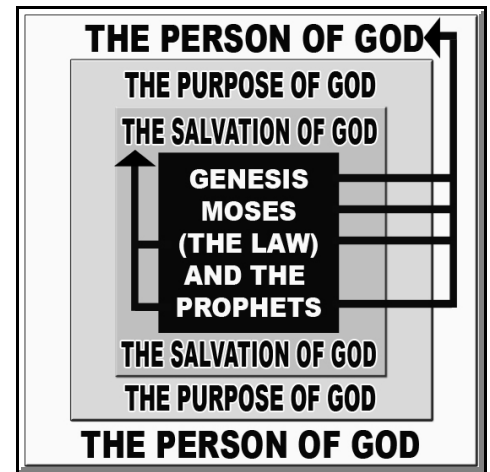
All of this confirms that the focus of those early revelations was God Himself, not people. Concerning His purpose, and the coming Christ, He only gave a veiled hint of such in the announcement of the Seed that would bruise the serpent's head (Ge 3:15). Also, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He divulged that the purpose involved the blessing of men (Gen 12:2-3l; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

However, until the time of Moses, there was no revelation concerning the New Covenant, the remission of sins, justification by faith, eternal life, a people being cultured for God Himself, the hope of glory, etc.

WHAT ARE WE TO CONCLUDE FROM THESE THINGS?

I see this as a very critical thing i.e. to draw some proper conclusion from the circumstances just mentioned.

First, the fundamental thing is to know God. The eternal purpose of God, and, in particular, His great salvation, are to be perceived within the framework of God Himself. This is because His purpose and His salvation are expressions of His Person. **If He Himself is not understood, it will not be possible to have a coherent view of either His purpose or His salvation.**



I am taking the time to briefly develop this thought because I am persuaded that *"the knowledge of God"* is not at an acceptable level within the professed church. The failure to comprehend God, as He can be comprehended, is responsible for all misunderstanding of Scripture, wresting of the Word, and divisions within Christendom. Contradicting theological views are developed because people entertain contradicting views of God.

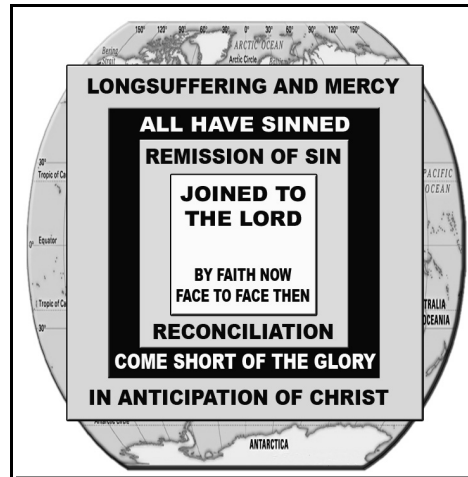
This is an inexcusable circumstance. Early in the inspired record God has clearly established that **He alone creates and sustains.** He has made known the fact that He **chooses**, and does so independently of human attainments. He has also made known

that man, left to himself, **degenerates**. He has also made clear that **He does not think as man**. There should be no question about these things – and yet there are such doubts and questions about them among professing Christians that it has staggered the thinking of the greatest among men.

The primary thing revealed in Moses and the Prophets is the Person of God – His character, traits, and Divine nature. In Moses there is a veiled introduction to the salvation of God through types and shadows, and a single pointed prophecy about the Messiah (Deut 18:15,18). The prophets, in a strictly introductory manner, foretold the salvation of God, as implemented through a Savior and a New Covenant. Neither Moses nor the Prophets ever delineated the “*eternal purpose*” of God, which was concealed until the exaltation of Christ Jesus (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 1:7; Eph 1:9 3:3-5,9; 6:19; Col 1:26).

If the revelations of God’s Person are missed in Genesis, men will not be able to correctly perceive His great salvation. They will be incapable of seeing the need for a Savior, the necessity of judging sin, and why sinners cannot ultimately stand in His presence. All of this has to do with the nature of God, and that is what is being made known in these texts. Again, salvation is, at this time, the premier expression of the Divine nature. However, if that nature is fundamentally unknown, there is no way that salvation can be

comprehended.



In order for men to have free access to and fellowship with God, the matter of sin must be resolved. Until then, God’s association with men must be initiated by Him, and then it is in strict accordance with His will. Any seeming tolerance toward the human race in general, or individuals in particular, is a revelation of the longsuffering and mercy of God, and is in no way to be taken as equating with thorough approval. Abraham and Sarah are cases in point.

Even this longsuffering and mercy was in prospect of the coming Savior, who is described as having been “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8), being “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:19).

In this text, and in order to establish that God is **basically** a Savior

rather than a Destroyer, Abimelech is spared. It was not owing to any righteousness that he possessed, but is strictly owing to God’s mercy, for there is no way to account for him remaining alive, other than God’s mercy.

Not withstanding, even in this circumstance, there are certain things that Abimelech must do in order to keep from being slain.

ONE FURTHER WORD

It is a display of gross ignorance for men to sit in judgment upon these early saints as though they were privy to all that has been revealed in Christ Jesus. **If God does not speak against these men and women of faith, none of their peers and fellow creations may do so!**

Even if some convincing argument could be put forth justifying such a critical analysis of those who have gone before us, it could only be done by those whose faith supercedes the faith of the likes of Noah and Abraham. Keep in mind, when speaking of the supposed sins of those early saints, we are speaking of one, two, or at the most three possible offenses.

Most of their critics exceed that number in a few days, and do in fact, far exceed them in their lifetime – and we are speaking of patriarchs that lived productively far in excess of one hundred years! – Noah 950 years (Gen 9:29), and Abraham 175 years (Gen 25:7). How foolish their critics are! And those who endure their criticisms are foolish as well.

AND ABRAHAM SOJOURNED IN GERAR

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

Abraham is continuing to “walk through the land,” as the Lord commanded him earlier (Gen 17:1). From that time until the time of our text, he had received confirmation of

God’s covenant with him, and the covenant of circumcision had been instituted (Gen 17:1-14. For the first time, he was told that Sarah would bear the promised heir (Gen 17:15-22). Ishmael, all of the males in Abraham’s household had been circumcised, as well as Abraham himself (Gen 17:23-27).

The Lord had appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre through three messengers, confirming the birth of Isaac in the coming year (Gen 18:1-15). There was also some divulgence to Abraham of what the Lord was going to do in Sodom and Gomorrah. At that time, Abraham interceded for any righteous that may have been in the cities (Gen 18:17-33).

Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed, together with the cities of Admah and Zeboim. Lot, his wife, and his daughters had been delivered from the city, with his wife being turned to a pillar of salt as she looked longingly back on Sodom. Abraham had seen the smoke of the destruction, confirming that it had taken place.

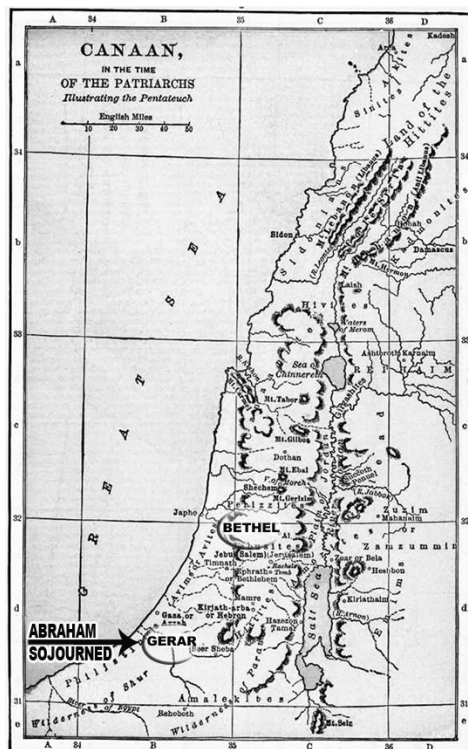
All of this had happened while Abraham was moving through the land. Now he arrives at Gerar, a Philistine city in the region occupied by the Philistines.

GERAR

Now Abraham is at the south-most part of the promised land. Gerar is adjacent to Beersheba, which was a kind of marker of the southern tip of the land. Dan was the northern mark. Thus we read “from Dan even to Beersheba” (Judges 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2,15; 1 Kgs 4:25).

This was an area occupied by the Philistines, and is later referred to as “the land of the Philistines” (Gen 21:32,34; 26:1). Jewish history notes them as continual enemies of Israel, reaching a crescendo during the time of Samson (Judges 14-16). Even when Israel came out of Egypt, God led them around “the land of the Philistines,” lest the people face war and become discouraged (Ex 13:17). Toward the close of Joshua’s death, this was a part of the promised land that had not yet been conquered (Josh 13:1-2).

This was part of the land God had promised to Abraham’s seed, so he is walking through the land becoming familiar with it.



A WORD FROM THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

The letter to Hebrew believers makes mention of this period of Abraham’s life. Genesis refers to this as the time when Abraham walked through the land, surveying what had been given to him. The letter to the Hebrews, however, takes an even higher view of this time. “*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:10). Stephen said of that time, “*And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to*

set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child” (Acts 7:5).

A LESSON TO BE LEARNED

Much of our pilgrimage in this world is spent walking through the spiritual territory that has been given to us. The exploration of domains like justification (Acts 13:39; Rom 5:1; 1 Cor 6:11), sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3-41 Pet 1:2), reigning in life (Rom 5:17), and the “*all things*” that are ours (1 Cor 3:21-23) are included. Walking through vast territories like “*all spiritual blessings in heavenly places*” (Eph 1:3), and “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3) are worthy of every effort that is required.

The nature of the walk of faith is made known in Abraham’s experience. It is a time when much takes place – by no means a boring existence. **As the redeemed walk through their land, there are times of illumination, blessing, and even danger.** There may even be judgments to cause greater sobriety among the elect.

There is an element of uncertainty that accompanies the faith life. We really do not know what a day will bring forth (Prov 27:1; James 4:13-15). For Abraham things included a famine, his wife being taken by another, the need to aggressively rescue Lot and his family, facing becoming a father at one hundred, contention in the home, long journeys, not having enough room, etc. **Why should those in Christ expect trouble-free lives?** Why should they be alarmed when hard tests come?

SARAH IS TAKEN BY ABIMELECH THE KING

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

This is a text with which many novices have great difficulty. They do not understand why Abraham would go

through this kind of trial once more, seeing that he had a previous experience like this. Their consternation, however, is owing to their failure to consider the whole of the matter.

AND ABRAHAM SAID OF SARAH

“And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister . . .”

This was the posture Abraham took as he journeyed through the land. Later he will explain that he had made a

decision to do so early on (20:13).

The previous occurrence like this took place in Egypt about **twenty-three years** earlier (Gen 12:11-20). Neither Abraham nor Sarah were reproved for their actions by God – at least not so far as the record is concerned. In fact, it was Pharaoh and his house that were plagued because of his action (Gen 12:17). **If God did not upbraid the patriarch, who has given men the right to do so?** This does not mean God approved of Abraham's action. It rather confirms what the Lord Jesus said, *"But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more"* (Luke 12:48). **Had Abraham been given the amount of insight granted to those in Christ Jesus, the matter would have even approached quite differently.**

So far as Abraham knew, this may have appeared an excellent protective strategy. It had all worked out before. He had not been corrected by the Lord previously, and there was apparently no reason to suspect this was not an acceptable thing to do.

I do understand that this was not technically a proper way of thinking. However, considering what Abraham had to work with, it seems unjust to me to expect him to have reasoned with

spiritual clarity on this matter.



ABIMELECH TOOK SARAH

" . . . and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah."

This is the manner of the ungodly – they take what does not belong to them. Technically speaking, even if Sarah had been viewed as Abraham's sister, it was not right for Abimelech to assume the right to take her for his own. However, Abimelech reasoned that this was the territory over which he ruled, and thus he could do as he willed within it. He will find that this was not true, for there was a Ruler above him, in whose territory he was trafficking. However, this was not known to him – at least not for the moment.

Divine Protection Is Not Always Apparent

Immediately we see that Divine protection is not always apparent. According to appearance, it looked as though both Abraham and Sarah were at the mercy of this heathen king. **However, God was controlling the situation, not Abimelech.**

The people of God must exercise personal discipline not to draw premature conclusions, or raise foolish questions while they remain in the pool of ignorance. I realize this is easier said than done – but it still must be done. When we find ourselves in the midst of trouble, we must not squeal like an entrapped pig. Faith can lead a person to insightfully confess, *"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"* (Phil 1:19). We have a promise of God on this matter: *"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom 8:28). And again, *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (1 Pet 5:10). **These are matters that were unknown to Abraham by a word from God.** He could only know them by correctly assessing his own life of faith – and that was in the stage of development. As for that matter, any knowledge that Abraham could possibly attain could only be comparatively partial.

THOU ART BUT A DEAD MAN

³ 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."

How will the God of heaven respond to this circumstance? Many professing Christian preachers and teachers respond by pointing the finger at Abraham, saying how little faith he really had. In a way, I am glad they have spoken in such a manner, for they

have thereby shown how they are not to be trusted with the Word of God.

There is no need to philosophize on this text. God has revealed His own response, and it is very clear – so clear, in fact, there is no way to misinterpret it. No one with understanding will either directly or indirectly affirm that God was wrong!

GOD CAME TO ABIMELECH

"But God came to Abimelech in a

dream by night, and said to him . . ."

It is important to know whom God confronted – Abraham or Abimelech. There can be no mistaking of the text, either in the Hebrew or in the English. **God came to Abimelech.** He is the one God confronted!

He came to the king in a dream, as He would do later to other heathen kings: Pharaoh (Gen 41:1-36), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1-45; 4:5-19).

Abimelech was a worshiper of other gods. How would he know this was the true God? He will know because the God who made man can make him aware of Himself. He did this with Adam and Eve and Cain. God can so speak to men that they know it is Him.

THOU ART BUT A DEAD MAN

" . . . Behold, thou art but a dead man . . ." Other versions read, "as good as dead," ^{NIV} "about to die," ^{NRSV} "You're going to die," ^{GWN} "You are to die," ^{NJB} and "for this you will die." ^{CEV}

announcement, Abimelech was going to die for what he did.

SHE IS A MAN'S WIFE

" . . . for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife." Other versions read, "she is married," ^{NASB} "she is a married woman," ^{NIV} "she hath a husband," ^{DOUAY} "she is someone else's wife," ^{NET} and "married to a husband." ^{YLT}

Abimelech has no cognitive relationship with God – no promises, no covenants, no law, or anything else that

apparently known to some degree by the human race, and Abimelech had violated this arrangement – even though he had done so unwittingly.

Something to Note

This very sin has been committed by a staggering number of professed "Christian" preachers and teachers – both well known, and relatively unknown. It has taken place in our own city, as well as many others throughout the country. These religious leaders have taken to themselves other men's wives. There are some who claim to be authorities, that classify this sin as an addiction the individual is powerless to suppress. If we knew nothing more about such things than the event we are now reviewing, we would see that such men are neither honest nor learned. They have ignored the fact that God has in some way inscribed His law upon men's hearts, so that even their conscience makes them accountable (Rom 2:15).

The fact that those who have committed this sin have not died, by no means suggests that God has changed His mind on this matter. If Abimelech, living in a time of far less light, was as good as dead because of what he had done. **What may be said of those who claim identity with God through Jesus Christ, doing the same thing when the Day Star has arisen with healing in His wings?**

This text should awaken some right thinking on this subject. There really is no excuse for taking another's wife, at any time, or under any circumstances.

This very sin has been committed by a staggering number of professed "Christian" preachers and teachers – both well known, and relatively unknown. It has taken place in our own city, as well as many others throughout the country. These religious leaders have taken to themselves other men's wives.

Let it be clear that this is a Divine response, and reflects the way God thinks about this kind of thing. If this matter was allowed to continue, Abimelech would die – die by the sentence of the Almighty.

The message was not sugar-coated or in any way toned down. As things stood at that time, and by Divine

has been addressed to him. **Yet, he is responsible to God for his conduct.** He has violated not only a standard for moral behavior, but a natural law as well. From the very beginning, before he had sinned, Adam said of the married, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto **his** wife: and they shall be **one flesh**" (Gen 2:24). This was

ABIMELECH REASONS WITH GOD

" ⁴ But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? ⁵ Said 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."

ABIMELECH HAD NOT COME NEAR HER

"But Abimelech had not come near her . . ." Other versions read, "had not gone near her," ^{NIV} "had not approached her," ^{NRSV} "had not touched her," ^{DOUAY} "hadn't slept with her yet" ^{LIVING} "I haven't slept with Sarah," ^{CEV} and "had

not yet slept with Sarah." ^{ERV/MESSAGE}

There is no legitimate way in which the Hebrew word translated "come near" can be made to mean "touched her," or "slept with." That is a purely human interpretation.

Mind you, I do not deny that this is implied by the word. **However, it is not God's manner to speak frankly about such matters. There is an obvious modesty emptied by God when addressing such matters.** The reason ought to be obvious: crude language awakens crude ideas and notions within men. When speaking of such moral transgressions as sodomy, for example, the Spirit will use expressions such as *"strange flesh"* (Jude 1:7), *"that which is not convenient"* (Rom 1:28), *"against nature"* (Rom 1:26), *"effeminate," "abusers of themselves with mankind"* (1 Cor 6:9), and *"them that defile themselves with mankind"* (1 Tim 1:9). Even the word *"adultery"* falls into this modest category (Ex 20:14).

I do not appreciate the liberal interpretation that some versions give this verse – *"touched her,"* ^{DOUAY} and *"slept with."* ^{LIVING/CEV/ERV/MESSAGE} There is no way that the word rendered *"come near"* can be so translated. The lexical meaning is as follows: **קָרַב** {KAW-RAB} **MEANING:** 1) TO COME NEAR, APPROACH, ENTER INTO, DRAW NEAR 1A) (QAL) TO APPROACH, DRAW NEAR 1B) (NIPHAL) TO BE BROUGHT NEAR 1C) (PIEL) TO CAUSE TO APPROACH, BRING NEAR, CAUSE TO DRAW NEAR 1D) (HIPHIL) TO BRING NEAR, BRING, PRESENT.— "TO APPROACH (CAUSATIVELY, BRING NEAR) FOR WHATEVER PURPOSE: — (CAUSE TO) APPROACH, (CAUSE TO) BRING (FORTH, NEAR), (CAUSE TO) COME (NEAR, NIGH), (CAUSE TO) DRAW NEAR (NIGH), GO (NEAR), BE AT HAND, JOIN, BE NEAR, OFFER, PRESENT, PRODUCE, MAKE READY, STAND, TAKE. ^{STRONG'S}

Because this is a commentary of the Holy Spirit on the conduct of Abimelech, I gather that it means he had not done anything that could possibly be interpreted as allowing for any form of intimacy with Sarah.

WILT THOU SLAY ALSO A RIGHTEOUS NATION?

" . . . and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? . . . " Other versions read, *"a nation, even though blameless,"* ^{NASB} *"an innocent nation,"* ^{NIV} *"an innocent people,"* ^{NRSV} *"an upright nation,"* ^{CJB} *"a nation, that is ignorant and just,"* ^{DOUAY} *"an ignorantly sinning and just nation,"* ^{SEPTUAGINT} *"a man even though he is innocent,"* ^{NAB} *"would you kill someone even if he is*

upright," ^{NJB} *"Would you destroy me and my people,"* ^{GNB} and *"will you slay a people who are just and innocent."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

of men, he acknowledged that he would not have taken this action if he had known the truth of the matter.

Actually, this is a most remarkable

Actually, this is a most remarkable text. Here is a Philistine king who is confronted by God and knows it, and reasons with Him in a manner that reveals more sensitivity toward right and wrong than is evidenced by many in this day.

This word was probably spoken against the backdrop of the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim. Their immoral status was probably known by the surrounding nations, who had not given themselves over to that form of reprobacy. The Lord had already said that Israel could not yet possess the land, because *"the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full"* (Gen 15:16). While they were by no means a virtuous people, they were not yet in a state like the cities of the plain that were destroyed. This is no doubt why Abimelech spoke of destroying a nation, instead of just himself. The Philistines, as wicked as they were, had not derided Abraham and Sarah as Sodom and Gomorrah did Lot. And, it appears, they had not committed the sin of sodomy as the cities that were destroyed.

It is comparatively speaking, that they were *"righteous"* – not in the sense of an living acceptable lives before the Lord.

SAID HE NOT UNTO ME?

"Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother . . . "

Both Sarah and Abraham had told Abimelech she was his sister, and Abimelech had proceeded to take Sarah for himself, thinking that was the case. Speaking to God, who knows the hearts

text. Here is a Philistine king who is confronted by God and knows it, and reasons with Him in a manner that reveals more sensitivity toward right and wrong than is evidenced by many in this day.

INTEGRITY AND INNOCENCY

" . . . in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this." Other versions read, *"a clear conscience and clean hands,"* ^{NIV} *"an upright heart and clean hands,"* ^{BBE} *"my heart has been pure and my hands innocent,"* ^{CJB} *"an upright mind and innocent hands,"* ^{GENEVA} and *"all innocence and with a clear conscience."* ^{GWN}

It is important that we understand the doctrine of Scripture concerning the depravity of the flesh. Paul said that he knew, and that very well, *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"* (Rom 7:18). What did he mean when he said this? Here are some things he did NOT mean.

- ➡ He did not mean that a person outside of Christ could not have integrity. We know this is true, for God will confirm that what Abimelech declared is the truth (Gen 20:6).
- ➡ He did not mean a person outside

of Christ could not pray, and, properly motivated, give alms to the poor – for Cornelius is declared to have done this acceptable prior to his conversion (Acts 10:1-4).

- ➔ He did not mean that a person outside of Christ could not *“do by nature the things contained in the Law”* (Rom 2:14).
- ➔ He did not mean that a person outside of Christ could not live *“in all good conscience,”* for that is how Paul lived prior to his conversion (Acts 23:1).

None of these conditions, however, is sufficient to justify a man before God. This is why Paul wrote, *“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but*

judgment.

That, however, is a New Covenant view. Prior to Christ, there were a few men who got a glimpse of this – but not many. Abraham reasoned with God with a realization of his own unworthiness (Gen 18:27). Job knew of his natural disqualification (Job 42:6). David knew of his fallen nature also (Psa 51:5). When standing before the Lord, Isaiah was made to realize his personal deficiency (Isa 6:5).

The controversy that God has with men is not merely that they do not do what they are supposed to do. **The primary fault of man is that he does not live to please God, and that he does not think like God.** It is also that he ascribes created things to another

advantage to the flesh. If we teach that may cannot do what is right, it will give an excuse or sinning, and give the flesh even more of an advantage than it already has.

Sin and opposition to God must be defined in the light of God’s purpose for men. That has been plainly stated. *“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring”* (Acts 17:26-28).

There is no deed, however virtuous it may appear, that can compensate for not living with God being prominent in the mind.

not before God” (Rom 4:2). No work, however noble it may be, can remove the fact that *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Any departure from the Divine nature, no matter how minuscule it may be, disqualifies one from dwelling forever in the courts of the Lord. Any advantages given to men in this world prior to the coming of Jesus Christ were temporary, and given in prospect of that coming. **Sin must be remitted, and righteousness must be imputed in order to arrive safely at the grave and the day of**

source, and does not engage in an earnest pursuit for the true God.

There are a lot of people who do not commit murder, or adultery – and even who do not steal from one another. But that does not suit them for Divine approval. **Admirable conduct cannot remove sin, or reconcile a person to God, or account him righteous in the eyes of God.**

Our doctrine must give no

Whatever else a person may do, and however noble it may appear, if he does not engage in a conscientious and diligent effort to *“find”* the Lord, nothing else than he does is of any lasting worth. **There is no deed, however virtuous it may appear, that can compensate for not living with God being prominent in the mind.** The truth of the matter is that *“for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”* To live as though that was not the case is to live under the cloud of Divine indignation.

I do not believe this is known by the “churched” public – at the very least that does not appear to be the case. If true, it is a condition that cannot be excused, and it is actually beneath the position occupied by Abimelech the Philistine king. Frankly, that is very low ground!

I WITHHELD THEE FROM SINNING AGAINST ME

“ 6 And 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.”

Now we will learn that the Sovereign Lord sometimes keeps sin from breaking forth like a broken dam. If it were not for this Divine activity, there would be no hope for the human race. Abimelech has thought that he has kept himself from doing what he

admitted was wrong. **Yet the Lord will tell him this is not an accurate assessment of the case.** Ultimately, Sin is not under the control of man, or even of Satan.

GOD SAID TO HIM IN A DREAM

"And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart . . ." Some versions read, "the dream," NASB/NIV/NSRV thus suggesting it was the very same dream in which God announced he was but a dead man. This does appear to be the meaning of the text.

"I Know"

God, who *"knoweth the thoughts of man,"* apprises Abimelech that He is already aware of the circumstance. He knows the king did this in the integrity of his heart.

I ALSO WITHHELD THEE

- ➡ God can harden a man's heart (Deut 7:13; 8:15; 9:7,12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8; Isa 63:17; John 12:40).
- ➡ God can make the hearts of men "fat," so that they have no spiritual sensibility or understanding (Isa 6:10).
- ➡ God can give man *"a new heart"* (Ezek 36:26).
- ➡ God can write His law upon the hearts of people (Jer 31:33; Heb

- ➡ God can put it into men's hearts to give their kingdoms to *"the beast"* in order that His will might be fulfilled (Rev 17:17).

The heart of man is the spiritual citadel of his person. It is where his will is found, and where purposes are conceived. Man may assume that such a thing cannot be controlled without reducing the person to a robotic state. However, this cannot be true, for man is both responsible and under Divine control. That is the clear declaration of scripture. God superintended the betrayal of Jesus, so that it was instigated by the right man, and took place at the right time. Therefore Peter said, *"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry . . . from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place"* (Acts 1:17,25).

The Lord can work through men like Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel to bring the appointed death of His Son to pass. That is involved in the words, *"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."* (Acts 4:27-28).

Thus, in our text, we are introduced to a God that works in a most personal way with men – even though they may not know it.

FROM SINNING AGAINST ME

" . . . from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her."

Notice, the Lord does not say He kept Abimelech from sinning against Sarah, or against Abraham, but against **Himself!** Here is a man – a heathen man

Thus, in our text, we are introduced to a God that works in a most personal way with men – even though they may not know it.

" . . . for I also withheld thee . . ."

Not only did the Lord know what was in Abimelech's heart, He accounts for the restraint of the king by saying He had kept him from coming near to Sarah. This confirms what Solomon expressed several centuries later: *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"* (Prov 21:1). In this case, Abimelech's heart was away from Sarah. We do not know precisely how this was carried out – but it was the Lord who did it. Perhaps he had a stronger attraction to someone else. Maybe duties pressed sore upon him so that he could not become involved.

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE LORD WITH THE HEARTS OF MEN

The association of the Lord with the hearts of men is frequently expressed in Scripture. Those who speak frequently about "the free will of man," or the "free moral agency of man," are not apt to mention these texts.

- ➡ God can make a man's heart obstinate (Deut 2:30).

8:10;10:16).

- ➡ God can put His fear into men's hearts (Jer 32:40).
- ➡ God can put it in the heart of a man to teach others the wisdom that he has been given (Ex 35:33-34).
- ➡ God can put wisdom into a person's heart (Ex 36:2; 1 Kgs 10:24).
- ➡ God can put in a king's heart the desire to beautify the house of the Lord (Ezra 7:27).
- ➡ God put into Nehemiah's heart to repair the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:12).
- ➡ God put into Nehemiah's heart to gather the people to reckon a genealogy among them (Neh 7:5).
- ➡ God can put gladness into the heart of a man (Psa 4:7).
- ➡ God can put an earnest care for the people of God into a man's heart (2 Cor 8:16).

– with whom God has made no covenant – and yet God kept him from sinning against Himself. I am sure this is not how Abimelech would have viewed the situation, but that is only because he was ignorant of the situation. The truth of the matter is that Sarah, like Abraham, belonged to the Lord. **She had been chosen by Him for a specific work, and God would not allow man – any man – to interfere with that work.**

And why was this so in this case? A full explanation is not provided, but we should be able to see the overall

sense of this Divine action.

The Lord has already announced that the world would be blessed through Abraham's seed, affirming that seed would be born through Sarah, and that his name would be called Isaac. **Had Abimelech been allowed to touch Sarah, treating her as his wife, some could argue that the offspring of Sarah, which would be born the next year, was his offspring.** However, God will not permit a circumstance to rise that would allow for such a conclusion.

SOMETHING GOOD TO SEE IN THIS

It should at once be evident that those who come to know the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1-2), and live within the boundaries of that will, have the definite advantage. This is precisely why it is written, *"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, he heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."* (1 John 5:14-15). That is truly critical knowledge – knowledge that no man can be without!

RESTORE HER, OR ELSE!

"⁷ Now 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."

First, God accounts for why He has not taken Abimelech's life. It is not merely because the king had not touched Sarah, but because God had not allowed him to do so. There are some things that Abimelech had to know. First, that God was over him, and did what he wanted to do with him. Second, that he had another man's wife in his house. Third, that Abraham was a prophet, and through him the situation would be corrected – not through Abimelech's reasoning.

RESTORE THE MAN'S WIFE!

"Now therefore restore the man his wife . . ." Other versions read, *"return the man's wife,"* ^{NIV} *"give the man back his wife,"* ^{BBE} *"deliver the man his wife again,"* ^{GENEVA} *"send the man's wife back,"* ^{NJB} *"restore her to her husband,"* ^{LIVING} *"Let her go back to him,"* ^{CEV} and *"give Abraham his wife again."* ^{ERV}

There are some wrongs that cannot be corrected or undone – like eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:3). In that case, the sentence of death was

carried out (Gen 3:15; Rom 5:12). The sins of Sodom had reached a point where nothing could be done to avert their demise.

Here, however, was a deed that could, in some way, be corrected. Abimelech could not keep Sarah in his house, choosing to conduct himself in an honorable way toward her. If he

HE IS A PROPHET

" . . . for he is a prophet . . ."

This is the first use of the word *"prophet"* in all of Scripture. No person is referred to as a *"prophet"* prior to this account.

It is true that Jude refers to a prophesy given by Enoch, who lived

He was God's appointed prophet to the generations between himself and Moses. God revealed to him things to come, and he was to pass them along as God's "prophet," or spokesman.

wanted to avoid the judgment of death, he had to return her to her husband.

Somehow, in our day, this aspect of the Divine nature has become obscure. Men continue to remain in circumstances that are wrong, and will lead to their demise. **Yet they blindly stumble along because their concept of God allows them to do so.** All men live within the framework of their perception of God.

hundreds of years before Abraham. *"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him"* (Jude 1:14-15). Enoch's immediate reference was

doubtless to the flood that would come.

In What Sense Was Abraham A Prophet?

We have no recorded prophesy given by Abraham. We have no record of him blessing Isaac, as Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau *“concerning things to come”* (Heb 11:20; Gen 27:27-40), and as Jacob blessed his sons (Heb 11:21; Gen 48:5-22). So far as the record is concerned, Abraham uttered no prophesies of the future. How, then, can he be called *“a prophet?”*

that afflicted them, and that they would come out *“with great substance”* (Gen 15:14).

- ➡ That his seed would come out of the afflicting nation in the fourth generation (Gen 15:16).
- ➡ The borders of the promised land were defined (Gen 15:18).
- ➡ The nations to be dispossessed were defined (Gen 15:19-21).

which the destiny of the world was suspended – be maintained. **It will be through the prophet, Abraham!** This is precisely the circumstance to which God referred when He said of Abraham, *“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him”* (Gen 18:19).

How Difficult Is It for Such Faithfulness to Occur?

Do not take for granted what a remarkable thing it is for a word from God to be passed down through generations! There was a time in Israel’s history, when the word was nearly forgotten, and was only restored after Hilkiah the high priest *“found the book of the law in the house of the LORD”* (2 Kgs 22:8). So far as the cognition of the king and the people were concerned at that time, it was just as though the Word of God did not exist. It was not passed along to the people, and over a period of time, it was not a prominent thing in their thinking.

A similar thing has taken place in our time. Under the watch of a professionalized clergy, the Word of God has been largely removed from human thought. The English language, once rich with Scriptural words, names, and idioms, no longer has this richness. People do not think or speak in concert with the Scriptures. Much preaching manifests a gross ignorance of Scripture, as theological expressions originating with men are chosen over inspired ones.

What has happened is exactly the opposite of what took place in the generations of Abraham from himself until Moses. Yes, he was a prophet, indeed!

HE SHALL PRAY FOR THEE

“ . . . and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live . . . ”

This is the first reference to prayer in the Bible. Prior to this, there were

A similar thing has taken place in our time. Under the watch of a professionalized clergy, the Word of God has been largely removed from human thought.

He was God’s appointed prophet to the generations between himself and Moses. God revealed to him things to come, and he was to pass them along as God’s *“prophet,”* or spokesman. God made things known to him that were to be given to future generations. **He made them known to Abraham, supernaturally, and He would enable the patriarch to remember them precisely, and inform his progeny of them.** This included the following.

- ➡ That all families of the earth would be blessed in him (Gen 12:3; 22:18).
- ➡ That the seed of Abraham would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars of the heavens (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 22:17).
- ➡ That the land of Canaan would be given to Abraham and his seed (Gen 13:15,17; 15:7; 17:8).
- ➡ That his seed would be strangers in a land that was not theirs, and would there be afflicted for four hundred years (Gen 15:13).
- ➡ That God would judge the nation

- ➡ That nations and kings would come from Abraham (Gen 17:5).
- ➡ That God would establish His covenant with Abraham and his seed (Gen 17:7).
- ➡ That God would be *“their God”* (Gen 17:8).
- ➡ The covenant of circumcision that was to be kept (Gen 17:10-14).
- ➡ That His covenant was established through Isaac and his progeny (Gen 17:21).
- ➡ That Abraham’s seed would possess the gate of their enemies (Gen 22:17).

It was critical that these revelations be passed down through succeeding generations – to Isaac, Jacob, Jacob’s sons and their offspring, to Joseph and to Moses in Egypt. The promises could not die, be forgotten, or swept away by the bitter experiences of life.

And how will all of this be accomplished? How will those words, revealed to Abraham – words upon

references to men calling upon the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4). Even calling on the name of Lord was rare at this time.

This is hardly something God would say of a transgressor – and if the interpretations of some men are correct, Abraham would have been a transgressor. To further complicate the matter, God must then be seen as overlooking his transgression.

The prayers of Abraham were apparently the only thing that stood between Abimelech and the judgment of the Almighty. This further accentuates the fact that Abraham was, indeed, a prophet. Not only did God speak through him, but he could speak profitably with God.

IF THOU RESTORE HER NOT

“ . . . and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.” Other

Or, is God able to so impact the human spirit that the person will act upon His word, even if it came to him in a dream?

versions read, *“you shall surely die and all who are yours,”* ^{NKJV} *“you may be sure that you and all yours will die,”* ^{NIV} *“be certain that death will come to you and all your house,”* ^{BBE} *“you and all who belong to you are doomed to die,”* ^{GWN} and *“I warn you that you are going to die, you and all your people.”* ^{GNB}

The greatness of the curse is too evident to be ignored. One man sinned, but many will be impacted by its judgment. **This should not be a strange concept to those who are familiar with the Word of God.** There is another man who sinned, and all of his progeny were impacted by it. Thus it is written,

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). On one occasion all of Israel was given up by God *“because of the sins of Jeroboam, and which he made Israel sin”* (1 Kgs 14:16; 1 Kgs 15:30). **This is an aspect of Divine judgment we do well to note.**

How will Abimelech respond to this warning – a warning that came to him in a dream? Will he reason that it was nothing more than a dream? Or, is God able to so impact the human spirit that the person will act upon His word, even if it came to him in a dream?

ABIMELECH REPORTS TO HIS SERVANTS

“⁸ Therefore 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.”

This account should arrest the attention of every spiritual sluggard. Here is a heathen man, unacquainted with the Lord, who responds **immediately** to a warning from heaven.

ABIMELECH ROSE EARLY IN THE MORNING

“Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning . . .” Other versions read, *“forthwith rising up in the night.”* ^{DOUAY}

The phrase *“early in the morning”* probably carries the same idea as is reflected in a word concerning Jesus, *“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed”* (Mark 1:35). That is, Abimelech got up before the sun had

risen, while the darkness of the night was still disappearing.

He wasted no time in rising the next day – probably because he found it difficult to sleep.

HE CALLED HIS SERVANTS

“...and called all his servants . . .” Other versions read, *“called all his officials,”* ^{NIV} *“called all his court officials,”* ^{NAB} *“summoned his full court,”* ^{NJB} and *“hastily called a meeting of all the palace personnel.”* ^{LIVING}

Since the judgment that was announced involved all who were his, the king summons everyone in the household, informing them of his dream.

HE TOLD THEM THESE WORDS

“ . . . and told all these things in their ears.”

Now all his household knew that a

death sentence had been pronounced upon their house if Abimelech did not restore Sarah to Abraham. The message had come from God, who had stopped Abimelech from coming near to Sarah. All of this was recounted to those in the house. Will it be received, or will the hearers dismiss the words as the expression of a madman?

THE MEN WERE SORE AFRAID

“ . . . and the men were sore afraid.” Other versions read, *“were very much afraid,”* ^{NKJV} *“greatly frightened,”* ^{NASB} *“full of fear,”* ^{BBE} *“were terrified,”* ^{CSB} *“exceedingly afraid,”* ^{DOUAY} *“were horrified,”* ^{NAB} *“great fear swept through the crowd,”* ^{LIVING} and *“were exceedingly filled with reverence and fear.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

One thing that may be said of these Philistines – they had a very real sense of Deity, and what was involved in displeasing a Deity.

I cannot imagine this kind of

response to a Divine warning in any segment of our government. It is, in fact, very difficult to conceive of it being registered in any of our modern churches. Yet, warnings even more solemn than this one has been issued to men.

➡ *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not **shall be damned.**" (Mark 16:16)*

➡ *"If any man defile the temple of God, **him shall God destroy;** for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor 3:17)*

➡ *"And to you who are troubled rest*

*with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire **taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" (2 Thess 1:7-8)*

➡ *"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: **but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.**" (Heb 13:4)*

➡ *"For the time is come that **judgment must begin at the house of God;** and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17)*

➡ *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, **shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**" (Rev 21:8)*

Why is it that texts like this do not provoke great fear among men? **It is because they are even more ignorant of God than Abimelech the Philistine!** They do not take His warnings seriously (if they even know them) because they are not convinced that *"He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"* (Heb 11:6). It is that simple!

WHY HAST THOU DONE THIS UNTO US?

"⁹ 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."¹⁰ And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?"

WHY HAST THOU DONE THIS UNTO US?

Abimelech had taken Abraham at his word – at least that is what he said. If he had only known that Sarah was Abraham's wife, he leaves the impression that he would not have taken her to himself. The fact that he said to God he had taken her with integrity of heart, and that God accepted what he said, confirms that this was the case. Now he faces Abraham with a question. Why has he said that Sarah was his sister, and why did Sarah acknowledge the same thing?

Will Abraham tell the truth? Or will he concoct some artificial explanation? That will reveal the heart of Abraham. It will show that Abraham did not have all of the answers because they had not been given to him. Further, we have no

record of an elaborate explanation being given to Abraham concerning the first time he said Sarah was his sister when they were in Egypt (Gen 12:13-20). In fact there is no record of God saying anything to Abraham about that matter.

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

Something to be seen here is this: when God is working with a person, it is likely that person will have to give frequent explanations for their conduct. This will confirm the integrity of their hearts, and their willingness to tell the truth about a matter.

Abraham's answer will confirm his unwillingness to speak a lie –

something some people have not been able to see in Abraham.

Once again, I want to draw attention to the severe limitation of being ignorant of the will of God on a subject. When God has not spoken on an matter, we should not expect men to conduct themselves as though He had. If, for example, Peter in his travels with his wife (1 Cor 9:5) had referred to her as his sister, doing so to avoid some anticipated trouble, that would have been altogether a different matter than Abraham doing so. He was living in a greater light concerning Divine protection, and could work the *"signs of an apostle"* as well (2 Cor 12:12).

It might be reasoned that this was sufficient to move Abraham to act differently before Abimelech than he did before Pharaoh. And, candidly, I am inclined to think in this manner. However, there is also the fact that what God says may very well dawn upon the soul at some later time

It must, however, also be acknowledged that God had told Abraham, “*I am Thy Shield*” (Gen 15:1). It might be reasoned that this was sufficient to move Abraham to act differently before Abimelech than he did before Pharaoh. And, candidly, I am

inclined to think in this manner. **However, there is also the fact that what God says may very well dawn upon the soul at some later time** – such as the day dawning, and the Day Star arising in the heart (2 Pet 1:19) – something which we are familiar.

At any rate, it appears to me there is good reason to be merciful toward Abraham at this time. This is particularly true in view of God’s own response to the situation. **That response offsets any argument to the contrary.** It is plain enough to be understood by all.

SURELY THE FEAR OF GOD IS NOT IN THIS PLACE

“¹¹ *And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.* ¹² *And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.* ¹³ *And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.*”

spiritual environment about him is noteworthy. **He detected that this was not an area in which the fear of God was prevalent.** Considering his limited exposure to the Lord, and the significant gaps of time that stood between those occurrences, this, to me, is a most remarkable circumstance. It reveals an aspect of faith, even when it is limited because of the fewness of known Divine utterances.

speaking was on a daily or frequent basis. With Abraham, Divine visitations were often separated by years.

If we learn anything from this occasion, it is that human thinking apart from revelation cannot reach its optimum – to say the least. I do not doubt that Abraham thought he was doing the right thing, not being given instructions to the contrary from heaven. **Yet, this was not strictly right, confirming the inability of the human mind to function righteously strictly on its own.**

Ideally speaking, it is true that it would have been better to have sought the Lord on this matter. However, seeking the Lord was not a common thing at this time.

BECAUSE I THOUGHT

“*And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place and they will slay me for my wife's sake . . .*” Other versions read, “*There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife,*” ^{NRSV} “*There is absolutely no fear of God in this place. They will kill me because of my wife,*” ^{CSB} “*there are no God-fearing people in this place, I'd be killed because of my wife,*” ^{GWN} “*I figured this to be a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her, I thought,*” ^{LIVING} and “*Surely there is no reverence or fear of God at all in this place, and they will slay me because of my wife.*” ^{AMPLIFIED}

The sensitivity of Abraham to the

Ideally speaking, it is true that it would have been better to have sought the Lord on this matter. However, seeking the Lord was not a common thing at this time. We have no record of Abraham initiating a conversation with God prior to this time – or, for that matter, of anyone else doing so. His communications with God were always a response to something God had said to Him. This was also true of Adam and Eve, Cain, and Noah.

Further, in this case, it is apparent that God had not spoken to him concerning what he was now facing.

The truth of the matter is that God was not noted for speaking with many people up to this time – and none of the

INDEED SHE IS MY SISTER

“*. . . And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife . . .*”

Commentators are divided in their view of this text.

ALBERT BARNES

“HE CONCLUDED THAT HIS LIFE WOULD BE IN DANGER ON ACCOUNT OF HIS WIFE, AND RESORTED TO HIS WONTED EXPEDIENT FOR SAFETY. HE HAD LEARNED TO TRUST IN THE LORD IN ALL THINGS; BUT HE DID NOT THINK THIS INCONSISTENT WITH USING ALL LAWFUL MEANS FOR PERSONAL SECURITY, AND HE WAS NOT YET FULLY ALIVE TO THE UNLAWFULNESS OF HIS USUAL PRETENSE. HE PLEADS.” ^{ALBERT BARNES}

PULPIT COMMENTARY

“THAT SARAH WAS THE GRAND-DAUGHTER OF TERAH, I.E. THE DAUGHTER OF HARAN, AND SISTER OF LOT, IN OTHER WORDS, ISCAH, HAS BEEN MAINTAINED (JOSEPHUS, AUGUSTINE, JEROME, JONATHAN). THAT SHE WAS TERAH’S NIECE, BEING A BROTHER’S DAUGHTER ADOPTED BY HIM, HAS RECEIVED SOME SUPPORT (CALVIN); BUT THERE SEEMS NO REASON FOR DEPARTING FROM THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT, THAT

SHE WAS HER HUSBAND'S HALF-SISTER, I.E. TERAH'S DAUGHTER BY ANOTHER WIFE THAN ABRAHAM'S MOTHER (ROSENMÜLLER, KALISCH, KEIL, KNOBEL)." PULPIT COMMENTARY

JOHN CALVIN

"WHEREFORE, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT LIE IN WORDS, YET WITH RESPECT TO THE MATTER OF FACT, HIS DISSIMULATION WAS A LIE, BY IMPLICATION. HE HAD, HOWEVER, NO OTHER INTENTION THAN TO DECLARE THAT HE HAD NOT DEALT FRAUDULENTLY WITH ABIMELECH; BUT THAT, IN AN AFFAIR OF GREAT ANXIETY, HE HAD CAUGHT AT AN INDIRECT METHOD OF ESCAPE FROM DEATH, BY THE PRETEXT OF HIS PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP TO HIS WIFE." JOHN CALVIN

SPEAKERS COMMENTARY

"SARAH'S NAME DOES NOT OCCUR IN THE GENEALOGIES, AND WE DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING OF HER BIRTH BUT THAT WHICH IS HERE STATED. SUCH MARRIAGES, THOUGH FORBIDDEN AFTERWARDS, (LEVITICUS 18:9, 11; 20:17; DEUTERONOMY 27:22,) MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ESTEEMED UNLAWFUL IN PATRIARCHAL TIMES, AND THEY WERE COMMON AMONG THE HEATHEN NATIONS OF ANTIQUITY. MANY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN INTERPRETERS, HOWEVER, THINK THAT DAUGHTER HERE MEANS GRANDDAUGHTER, AND THAT SARAH WAS THE SAME AS ISCAH, THE SISTER OF LOT, (GENESIS 11:29,) WHO IS CALLED THE BROTHER OF ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 14:16." SPEAKERS COMMENTARY

ADAM CLARKE

"SHE IS MY SISTER— I HAVE NOT TOLD A LIE; I HAVE SUPPRESSED ONLY A PART OF THE TRUTH. IN THIS PLACE IT MAY BE PROPER TO ASK, WHAT IS A LIE? IT IS ANY ACTION DONE OR WORD SPOKEN, WHETHER TRUE OR FALSE IN ITSELF, WHICH THE DOER OR SPEAKER WISHES THE OBSERVER OR HEARER TO TAKE IN A CONTRARY SENSE TO THAT WHICH HE KNOWS TO BE TRUE. IT IS, IN A WORD, ANY ACTION DONE OR SPEECH DELIVERED WITH THE INTENTION TO DECEIVE, THOUGH BOTH MAY BE ABSOLUTELY TRUE AND RIGHT IN THEMSELVES. THE DAUGHTER OF MY FATHER, BUT NOT-OF MY MOTHER— EBN BATRICK, IN HIS ANNALS, AMONG OTHER ANCIENT TRADITIONS HAS PRESERVED THE FOLLOWING: "TERAH FIRST MARRIED YONA, BY WHOM HE HAD ABRAHAM; AFTERWARDS HE MARRIED TEHEVITA, BY WHOM HE HAD SARAH." THUS SHE WAS THE SISTER OF ABRAHAM, BEING THE DAUGHTER OF THE SAME FATHER BY A DIFFERENT MOTHER." ADAM CLARKE

KEIL AND DELITZSCH

"THE LATTER [ABRAHAM] HAD BUT TWO WEAK EXCUSES: (1) THAT HE SUPPOSED THERE WAS NO FEAR OF GOD AT ALL IN THE LAND, AND TREMBLED FOR HIS LIFE BECAUSE OF HIS WIFE; AND (2) THAT WHEN HE LEFT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE, HE HAD ARRANGED WITH HIS WIFE THAT IN EVERY FOREIGN PLACE SHE WAS TO CALL HERSELF HIS SISTER, AS SHE REALLY WAS HIS HALF-

SISTER." KEIL AND DELITZSCH

All of this accents the necessity of teaching being built around Divine affirmations, and not what men have said or thought about those affirmations. This is certainly not to say that godly men ought to avoid having well thought views of a text, and no thinking person would impose such a restriction upon his brethren. However, when it comes to teaching, it must be solidly based, else it will leave the door ajar for the entrance and prominence of human tradition and opinion.

No person should seek to bind a personal view upon another beyond the ability of that person to comprehend the reasoning that led to that view. There are people who, by sound thought and the proper integration of Scripture, have arrived at a valid conclusion. That conclusion, however, must not be bound on those unable to see the reasoning leading to it, nor can it be established as an official tenet of faith.

When there is a diversity of views of a Scriptural statement that are in conflict with one another, someone has taken the statement further than the Spirit intended it to be taken.

As for myself, I choose to take this text as it stands, believing that Abraham had noble intentions, but minimal knowledge of the

taken place, yet with no explanatory editing by the Spirit.

- ➡ This means that it was revealed to Moses. He was not recording an event he had personally seen.
- ➡ If there was a fundamental flaw in Abraham, the Spirit would have made it known – as he did with Adam and Eve, Cain, Lamech, Nimrod, and others.

GOD CAUSED ME TO WANDER

"And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house . . ." Other versions read, *"had me wander,"* ^{NIV} *"sent me wandering,"* ^{BBE} *"had me leave my father's house,"* ^{CJB} *"brought me out of my father's house,"* ^{DOUAY} *"sent me wandering,"* ^{NAB} *"sent me traveling far from my childhood home,"* ^{LIVING} and *"leave my father's home and start wandering."* ^{CEV}

As it is used here, the word *"wander"* has the following lexical meaning: "TO WANDER ABOUT (PHYSICALLY) . . . TO BE MADE TO WANDER ABOUT . . . TO CAUSE TO WANDER . . . TO CAUSE TO WANDER ABOUT (PHYSICALLY)." ^{STRONG'S}

This word refers to the call of God for Abraham to go to an unknown place: *"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee"* (Gen 12:1). The epistle to

In this wandering Abraham had to keep on the move without knowing his destination. It was not, what you might say, pure wandering, for he was directed along the way in ways that are not specified in Scripture.

circumstances. I do this based upon the following observations.

- ➡ The account was written at least five hundred years after it had

the Hebrews refers to this circumstance: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out,*

not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:" (Heb 11:8-9). Stephen referred to this wandering in his dissertation to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:6-3-5).

indicates that God's calling was accompanied by a necessary dependence upon Himself.

A Parallel to Spiritual Life

The wandering mode of Abraham's life also depicts the life of the believer. Such are referred to as "*strangers and*

also [they] look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

They also are being directed from above – "*led by the Spirit*" (Rom 8:13-14). In them the prophetic saying is fulfilled: "*And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left*" (Isa 30:21).

I MADE THIS DECISION A LONG TIME AGO

"when God caused me to wander from my father's house . . . that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother."

The record first mentions this word when Abraham had entered Egypt, having previously arrived in the promised land during a famine (Gen 12:11). Whether he had originally told Sarah this when they first began their journey, confirming it when they entered Egypt, or did not mention it until that time. I do not know. The text suggests that the decision was made near the commencement of their wandering, which was probably several years before they entered Egypt.

At any rate, Abraham wanted Abimelech to know this was not a decision based solely upon the present circumstances. He is straightforward in his answer, with no ambiguity.

It is more than passingly interesting that Abraham refers to this as God causing him to wander. This is not a statement of complaint, but rather indicates that God's calling was accompanied by a necessary dependence upon Himself.

In this wandering Abraham had to keep on the move without knowing his destination. It was not, what you might say, pure wandering, for he was directed along the way in ways that are not specified in Scripture. This posture is also referred to as sojourning (Gen 12:10; 20:1; 21:23,24; 23:4; 35:27; Acts 7:6; Heb 11:9), being a pilgrim (Ex 6:4; Heb 11:13), and being a stranger (Gen 15:13; 17:8; 23:4; Heb 11:13).

It is more than passingly interesting that Abraham refers to this as God causing him to wander. This is not a statement of complaint, but rather

pilgrims," presently occupying a land in which they do not belong (1 Pet 2:11). They are looking for, and journeying to, "*a better country, that is, an heavenly*" (Heb 11:16), and with the pilgrims before them, they too are looking "*for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God*" (Heb 11:10). This is the manner of living by faith, and has been particularly from Abraham until this day.

Like others whom Jesus chose, they are "*not of the world*" (John 15:19; 17:14,16), having their real citizenship "*in heaven; from whence*

ABIMELECH RESTORED SARAH

"¹⁴ And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee."

Here is an historical example of God working all things together for the good of a person. The whole event, which, according to appearance, could

very well have worked to Abraham's detriment, worked out for his good. It was really the Lord who increased Abraham, choosing to do so rough Abimelech the Philistine.

ABRAHAM'S WEALTH GROWS

"And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham . . ."

We do not know the magnitude or smallness of Abraham's possessions when he left Ur of the Chaldees.

➡ At that time, leaving with Terah, Abram, Sarai, and Lot left Ur "*to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there*" (Gen 11:31). There is no reference at that point of Abram's possessions. Stephen also refers to it with no mention of his

belongings (Acts 7:4). The eleventh chapter of Hebrews also omits any reference to what Abram owned (Heb 11:8). Joshua mentioned the departure with no reference to Abram's wealth (Josh 24:3). Nehemiah does the same (Neh 9:7).

➔ During his stay in Haran, Abram, increased in wealth. As it is written, ***"And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came"*** (Gen 12:5).

➔ After spending some time in Egypt during the famine that was in Canaan, Abram once again increased in goods. While Sarai was temporarily in the house of Pharaoh, ***"he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels"*** (Gen 12:16). When leaving Egypt, and for the first time, it is said of Abram, ***"And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold"*** (Gen 13:2).

➔ Now, after the episode with Abimelech, it is written, ***"And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham"*** (Gen 20:14).

You see, then, how marvelously the Lord increased the wealth of Abraham so that he would not be dependent upon the support of heathens.

Thus, over a period of at least twenty-four years (from Abraham being seventy-five, until he was ninety-nine), Abraham went from a state in which no mention was made of his possessions, to being ***"very rich in cattle, silver and***

gold." All of this was done while he was on the move, obeying the Lord – first by journeying to Canaan, and then by, going into Egypt to be sustained during as famine, and then by walking



through the land. His experiences, whether of famine, warfare, benefit, or trial, were all entertained while he was a pilgrim on the move.

The Parallel to Life in Christ

The parallel to life in Christ is remarkable. We also accrue goods after we leave the world and engage in a quest for glory. Alone the way, and through varied experiences, more and more is added to our spiritual treasury. There are things to be added to our faith (2 Pet 1:5-8), and "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Eph 1:3). There are also "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 et 1:3), and ***"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" that are hidden in Christ Jesus*** (Col 2:3). There is ***"the new man,"*** which is to be ***"put on"*** (Eph 4:24), together with ***"the whole armor of God"*** (Eph 6:11), and ***"bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"*** (Col 3:12).

All of this is done while we are

sojourning as ***"strangers and pilgrims"*** in this world (1 Pet 2:11). There is no other posture of faith. All valid experience is to viewed from the pasture of a pilgrim who is presently in a strange land.

As soon as the professing believer settles down in this world, and begins to live as though his home was here, he is no longer able to properly assess any experience – whether it be blessing, trial, increase, or sorrow.

SARAH IS RESTORED TO ABRAHAM

" . . . and restored him Sarah his wife. . . " Other versions read, ***"returned Sarah his wife."*** ^{NIV}

What a blessed reunion that must have been! The would be particularly true of a couple who had been told they were going to have a promised heir born to them in the next year. They had just passed through circumstances that appeared to threaten the possibility of that promise being fulfilled. However, unbeknown to Pharaoh, and somewhat hidden from Abraham and Sarah, God was going bringing His counsel to pass.

ABRAHAM IS GIVEN HIS CHOICE OF THE LAND

"And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee." Other versions read, ***"settle wherever you please,"*** ^{NASB} ***"live wherever you like,"*** ^{NIV} ***"take whatever place seems good to you,"*** ^{BBE} ***"where it is good in thine eyes, dwell,"*** ^{YLT} ***"choose the place where you want to live,"*** ^{LIVING} ***"You may live any place you want."*** ^{ERV}

Thus, long before it was written, it was clearly demonstrated ***"When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"*** (Prov 16:7). Let it be clear, that this is something caused by God, not by human endeavors. It therefore behooves us to conduct ourselves in a manner that pleases the Lord, for only so will this be experienced.

AND SHE WAS REPROVED

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 reproved.”*

I HAVE GIVEN THY BROTHER

“And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver . . .” Other versions read, *“a thousand shekels of silver [that is, about 25 pounds],”* ^{NIV} *“a thousand bits of silver”* ^{BBE}

It is not clear why the thousand pieces of silver were given, although there has been considerable conjecture about it. I will cover that later.

HE IS TO THEE A COVERING

“ . . . behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee and with all other. . .” Other versions read, *“indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody,”* ^{NKJV} *“behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you,”* ^{NASB} *“To Sarah he said, “This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you,”* ^{NIV} *“it is your exoneration before all who are with you,”* ^{NRSV} *“so that your wrong may be put right,”* ^{BBE} *“That will allay the suspicions of everyone who is with you,”* ^{CJB} *“It is a verification of your honor to all who are with you,”* ^{CSB} *“It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you,”* ^{ESV} *“he is the veil of thine eyes to all that are with thee,”* ^{GENEVA} *“This is to silence any criticism against you from everyone with you,”* ^{GWN} *“to compensate for any embarrassment and to settle any claim against me regarding this matter,”* ^{LIVING} *and “see, it is to compensate you [for all that has occurred] and to vindicate your honor before all who are with you.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

When he spoke to Sarah, and referring to Abraham, said, *“thy brother,”* it must have been a dagger in her heart, and in Abraham’s as well. Abimelech knew now that she was Abraham’s wife. That is why he restored her to Abraham after he had

been made painfully aware of the real circumstance.

There are three possible interpretations that are assigned to this text. It is obvious there is some difficulty in determining its meaning.

- ➔ According to the customs of the ancient East, veiled women were married women, and unveiled women were not married. Because Sarah had apparently not been veiled, this silver was a kind of legal substitute for that veil. This seems a but too contrived for me.
- ➔ That the silver was given as an atonement for the wrong done to Sarah. Covering the eyes would

“you are cleared,” ^{NASB} *“you are completely vindicated,”* ^{NIV} *“you are righted,”* ^{RSV} *“your honor is clear in the eyes of all,”* ^{BBE} *“remember thou wast taken,”* ^{DOUAY} *“speak the truth in all things,”* ^{SEPTUAGINT} *“your honor has been preserved with everyone,”* ^{NAB} *“by all this she is reasoned with,”* ^{YLT} *“Now justice has been done,”* ^{LIVING} *“in all things you be truthful,”* ^{ABP} *“proof to everyone that you have done nothing wrong,”* ^{CEV} *“I want everyone to see that I did the right thing,”* ^{ERV} *“And with all this you are reproved,”* ^{LITV} *and “before all men you are cleared and compensated.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

Again, the various versions present a series of conflicting views of the words *“she was reproved.”* The

Abimelech knew now that she was Abraham’s wife. That is why he restored her to Abraham after he had been made painfully aware of the real circumstance.

thus be considered a covering of any shame that might have been associated with Abimelech taking Sarah. This also appears to me to be stretching the matter a bit too much. In the first place, Abimelech had not done wrong against Sarah, unless taking her be considered so.

- ➔ That Abraham himself was the established covering for Sarah, being not only her husband, but a prophet as well. This would be an acknowledgment that God had protected Sarah for Abraham’s sake. Abimelech’s gift of silver to the patriarch would thus be a token of his acknowledgment of that fact. **This seems to me to be the best view, although it is not altogether without questions.**

THUS SHE WAS REPROVED

“ . . . thus she was reproved.” Other versions read, *“she was rebuked,”* ^{NKJV}

following thought is conveyed in these contradicting versions.

- ➔ Sarah was reproved, or rebuked. ^{KJV/NKJV/DARBY/GENEVA/RWB/WEB/LITV}
- ➔ Sarah was cleared from the charge of wrong doing. ^{NASB/BBE/CJB/GOD’S WORD/NAS/GW}
- ➔ Sarah was vindicated. ^{NIV/NRSV/CSB/ESV/NAU/NET/NIB/NJB/ESV/ISV/MESSAGE}
- ➔ Sarah was righted. ^{ASV/RSV/ERV/JPS}
- ➔ Sarah was to remember that she was taken. ^{DOUAY}
- ➔ Silence any criticism against Sarah. ^{GOD’S WORD}
- ➔ Sarah was to speak the truth. ^{SEPTUAGINT/ABP/BRENTON}
- ➔ Sarah’s honor was preserved.

NAB/BBE

- ➔ Sarah was reasoned with. ^{YLT}
- ➔ Justice had now been done. ^{LIVING}
- ➔ Sarah had done nothing wrong. ^{CEV/GNB}
- ➔ Abimelech had done the right thing. ^{ERV}
- ➔ Sarah was compensated for the inconvenience caused her. ^{LIVING}

Although I do not desire to make a practice of this, I will here supply the various comments on this verse that have been made by competent commentators. This is given for those who are interested in such things. Following this listing I will make a comment on this approach to Scripture.

COMMENTATORS ON “SHE WAS REPROVED”

PULPIT COMMENTARY: “Thus she was reproved. וְנִכְזְּתָה. If a third person singular niph. of כָּטָה; (Onkelos, Arabic, Kimchi, Gesenius, Rosenmüller, Furst), then it is the historian’s statement signifying that Sarah had been convicted, admonished, and left defenseless (Gesenius); or, connecting the preceding words כָּל אֲתוֹרָהּ, that, with regard to all, right had been obtained (Furst), or that all had been done that she might be righted (Murphy); but if a second person singular niph. (LXX., Vulgate, Delitzsch, Keil, Lange, Murphy, Kalisch), then it is a continuation of Abimelech’s address, meaning neither καὶ πάντα ἀλήθευσον (LXX.), nor *memento te deprehensam* (Vulgate), but either, “and thou art reproved” (Wordsworth), or, “and thou wilt be recognized” (Kalisch), or, again connecting with the preceding words, “and with all, so thou art justified or set right” (Delitzsch, Keil, Lange), or, “and all this that thou mayest be righted” (Murphy) or “reproved” (Ainsworth). ^{PULPIT COMMENTARY}

JOHN GILL: “Sarah was reproved for saying that Abraham was her brother: or the words may be rendered thus, “and so before all she was reproved;” before her husband, and before Abimelech’s courtiers, and perhaps before her own servants; though Ainsworth, and others, take them to be the words of Abimelech, and render them, “and all that”, or “all this is that thou mayest be rebuked,” or instructed; all that I have said and done is for this end, that thou mayest be warned and be careful for the future to speak out

truth, without any equivocation, and not call Abraham thy brother, when he is thy husband.” ^{JOHN GILL}

JOHN CALVIN: “Interpreters distort this clause also. The natural exposition seems to me to be, that the Lord had suffered Sarah to be reproved by a heathen king, that he might the more deeply affect her with a sense of shame. For Moses draws especial attention to the person of the speaker; because it seemed a disgrace that the mother of the faithful should be reprehended by such a master. Others suppose that Moses speaks of the profit which she had received; seeing that she, instructed by such a lesson, would henceforth learn to act differently. But Moses seems rather to point out that kind of correction of which I have spoken; namely, that Sarah was humbled, by being delivered over to the discipline of a heathen man.” ^{JOHN CALVIN}

ALBERT BARNES: “He then accosts Sarah in respectful terms, informing her that he had presented her brother with one thousand silver pieces, probably shekels, on her account. He does not offer this directly

DELITZSCH & C.F. KEIL: “By the ‘covering of the eyes’ we are not to understand a veil, which Sarah was to procure for 1000 shekels; but it is a figurative expression for an atoning gift, and is to be explained by the analogy of the phrase כָּפַר פְּנֵי “to cover any one’s face,” so that he may forget a wrong done (cf. Genesis 32:21; and Job 9:24, “he covereth the faces of the judges,” i.e., he bribes them). וְנִכְזְּתָה can only be the 2 pers. fem. sing. perf. Niphal, although the Dagesh lene is wanting in the t; for the rules of syntax will hardly allow us to regard this form as a participle, unless we imagine the extremely harsh ellipsis of וְנִכְזְּתָה לְפָנֶיךָ. The literal meaning is “so thou art judged,” i.e., justice has been done thee.” ^{DELITZSCH and C.F. KEIL}

SUNDRY OBSERVATIONS

- ➔ The meaning to texts cannot be settled by an appeal to customs of the day. To begin with, the text was written at least five hundred years after the events occurred.

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to herself, that it may be distinctly understood that her honor was unstained.” ^{ALBERT BARNES}

ADAM CLARKE: “The original is וְנִכְזְּתָה, but the word is probably the second person preterite, used for the imperative mood, from the root כָּטָה, to make straight, direct, right; or to speak rightly, correctly; and may, in connection with the rest of the text, be thus paraphrased: Behold, I have given thy BROTHER (Abraham, gently alluding to the equivocation, Genesis 20:2, 5) a thousand shekels of silver; behold, IT is (that is, the silver is, or may be, or let it be) to thee a covering of the eyes (to procure a veil; see above) with regard to all those who are with thee; and to all (or and in all) speak thou the truth. Correctly translated by the Septuagint, καὶ πάντα ἀλήθευσον and in all things speak the truth — not only tell a part of the truth, but tell the whole; say not merely he is my brother, but say also, he is my husband too. Thus in ALL things speak the truth. I believe the above to be the sense of this difficult passage, and shall not puzzle my readers with criticisms.” ^{ADAM CLARKE}

- ➔ An etymological approach to the text, strictly based upon the rules of language, is not a satisfactory approach either. It assumes an exact parallel of from/to language expressions, which is rarely, if ever, the case. When lexical definitions are not in agreement, they cannot be the foundation upon which Scriptural meaning is established.

- ➔ When men who are knowledgeable of the text of Scripture and the precision of language, cannot agree as to the meaning of a text, the criterion by which texts are being judged cannot be the same. This also indicates the pursuit of something God did not mean to communicate in the language of the text.

Also, in Scripture, main things are emphasized, discouraging the inordinate pursuit of fuller meanings where they are not given.

THE MEANING AS I SEE IT

As I see the text, there are several suggestions.

- ➔ Sarah being “reproved” was her own view, as well as that of Abimelech. The king’s reference to Abraham as her “brother” appears to support this meaning.

- ➔ There was also an apparent effort on the part of Abimelech to correct the error he had made.

- ➔ There was also a provision to ensure that someone else in the Gerar would not make the same mistake Abimelech made.
- ➔ Abraham doubtless saw more

clearly that it was not needful for him to resort to saying Sarah was his sister.

- ➔ Also, in Scripture, main things are emphasized, discouraging the inordinate pursuit of fuller meanings where they are not given.

That is as far as I can take this text, the chief reason being that God Himself has taken it no further. This approach seems to me to blend in well with the remainder of the text. It also spares us the time required to follow an intellectual path having a dead end. The people of God are taught to avoid lines of thinking that are “endless” (1 Tim 1:4).

SO ABRAHAM PRAYED UNTO GOD

“¹⁷ So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham’s wife.”

ABRAHAM PRAYED UNTO GOD

“So Abraham prayed unto God. . .”

This is the first time the word “prayed” is used in Scripture. In fact, this is the first time prayer in any of its varied forms is used (pray, prayer, prayers, prayeth, praying).

God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him (Gen 20:7), and now Abraham does. Being as this is the first time prayer is particularly mentioned (there are instances where men called upon the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26; 12:8), **I gather that Abraham was in some way directed to do this.** In some way this was related to Abimelech not dying because of Abraham’s prayer, for God had said, “he shall pray for thee, **and thou shalt live**” (Gen 20:7).

Here was an ancient example of

something John wrote centuries later: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, **he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death . . .**” (1 John 5:16). A “sin unto death” is one that necessarily leads to a death that cannot be averted – such as that of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7), Onan (Gen 38:9-10), Judas (Acts 1:25), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and Herod (Acts 12:21-23).

GOD HEALED ABIMLECH, HIS WIFE, AND HIS MAIDSERVANTS

“ . . . and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. . . ”

The nature of the healing is confirmed by the fact that children were again born in Abimelech’s household. Both men and women had apparently been rendered incapable of procreation.

THE LORD HAD FAST CLOSED ALL THE WOMBS

“ . . . For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech . . . ” Other versions read, “closed fast,” ^{NASB} “kept all the women of the house of Abimelech from having children,” ^{BBE} “made it impossible for

any woman in Abimelech’s household to have children,” ^{GWN} “caused infertility to strike every woman in the household of Abimelech,” ^{NET} “made barren all the females of the house of Abimelech,” ^{WEB} and “had restrained every womb of the house of Abimelech.” ^{YLT}

This suggests that Abraham was in Gerar, and that Abimelech had Sarah, for some time, else the significance of the text is greatly obscured. This could have been for as much the remainder of the current year, or even more. Some have resolved the matter by assuming that the text is not chronological, but that all of this took place some time earlier. That seems to me to be assuming too much.

I will simply leave the text as it stands, assuming the events here mentioned did not take place within a short span of time.

BECAUSE OF SARAH

“ . . . because of Sarah Abraham’s wife.” Other versions read, “to punish Abimelech for taking Abraham’s wife,” ^{LIVING} and “on account of Abraham’s wife Sarah.” ^{ISV} Most versions read “because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.”

This seems to me to confirm that God did not account this as transgression on Sarah's part. By	plaguing Abimelech's house in the manner described, He ensured that when Isaac was born, there would be	no doubt who the father was – for Isaac was going to be born the next year.
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Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/6/12. We will continue our series of lessons in the book of Genesis. The thirty-first lesson will cover verses 1 through 21 of chapter twenty-one: "ISAAC IS BORN AND HAGAR AND ISHMAEL ARE EXPELLED." The prophesied time for the birth of Abraham's heir arrived, just as he had been told the year before. Eventually, however, trouble erupted between Ishmael and Isaac. This resulted in the expulsion of Hagar and her son from the house, for the boys, by Divine intention, could not dwell together. This becomes a pattern by which our thinking concerning the promises, the children of God, and the nature of the New Covenant will be formed. The meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.