God's Sovereign Intervention

Genesis 20:1-18
8/16/98

Introduction: History repeats itself. Abraham lies about his wife to the King of Gerar.

The potential tragedy (v.1-2)

**** God mercifully intervenes in potentially tragic situations!***

I. God's Sovereign <u>CONFRONTATION</u> (v.3-5)

(God supernaturally revealed to Abimelech that he was in danger of losing his life)

II. God's Sovereign <u>PREVENTION</u> (v.6)

(God providentially prevented Abimelech from committing adultery with Sarah)

III. God's Sovereign <u>COMMAND</u> (v.7-8)

(God authoritatively orders Abimelech to restore Abraham's wife to him)

IV. God's Sovereign <u>REBUKE</u> (v.9-13)

(God providentially rebukes Abraham through Abimelech)

V. God's Sovereign <u>GRACE</u> (v.14-18)

(God graciously blesses Abraham through Abimelech and Abimelech through Abraham)

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The potential tragedy (v.1-2)

v. 1
Again for the second time, when Abraham makes a move south, he finds trouble meeting him.

In Genesis 12 when Abraham went down into Egypt, he met trouble with Pharaoh (Gen. 12:9-15). Now history repeats itself.

v. 2
"She is my sister" – This is the second time that Abraham said this about Sarah (with an intention to deceive) in order to save his own neck.

He hadn't learned his lesson to completely trust God the first time, so through "the ringer" he goes again.

Beware: A sinful act can become a sinful pattern if we do not repent and learnt o trust and completely obey God.

Sarah was indeed a half-sister to Abraham (they had the same father, but not the same mother – 20:12); however, she was still his wife, and because of this, his half truth was a whole lie.

The Bible tells it like it is. "This chapter would be an embarrassment to us except for one thing: The Bible tells the truth about *all* people, and that includes God's people. It does not hide the fact that Noah got drunk and exposed himself (Gen. 9:20-23) or that Moses lost his temper (Num. 20:1-13), or that David committed adultery and plotted the death of a valiant soldier (2 Sam. 11). Peter denied the Lord three times (Mt. 26:69-75), and Barnabas lapsed into false doctrine (Gal. 2:13)." (Wiersbe, p. 86).

Now the amazing thing in all of this is that Sarah was now 90 years old and was still attractive to Abimelech, who had many unmarried women in his harem. She by this time was probably already pregnant with Isaac from Abraham (as the Lord had promised – Gen. 18:10-15). It is just like Satan to try to confuse the lineage of the Jewish race right from the beginning by attempting to produce confusion as to who her son was conceived by. Such an attempt would fail, however.

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I. God's Sovereign <u>CONFRONTATION</u> (v.3-5)

(God supernaturally revealed to Abimelech that he was in danger of losing his life)

v. 3

"God came. . . in a dream" – God would often send a supernatural dream about impending judgment even to a pagan leader. He did this to Pharaoh of Egypt and to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

"Thou art but a dead man" – What strong words! "Abimelech! It's over! Your life is history! You are going to die!"

Imagine having God say this to you?! Such words should convey this truth to all of us: Adultery is an extremely serious offense against God! "Adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

"She is a man's wife" – Even the pagan Abimelech knew that adultery was wrong. It is wrong to take something that doesn't belong to you! The two becoming one (Gen. 2:24) is a fundamental principle that is not to be violated. All violators are in trouble by God!

v. 4

"Abimelech had not come near her" – No doubt he had tried, but God wouldn't allow him (v. 6). God apparently afflicted him in such a way that he couldn't come near Sarah even if he wanted to.

v. 5

Abimelech pleads innocent. He really didn't know Sarah was married, since he had been lied to. He cold not be blamed or judged since he was acting based on the facts he had been given.

II. God's Sovereign PREVENTION (v.6)

(God providentially prevented Abimelech from committing adultery with Sarah)

v. 6

"I also withheld thee from sinning against me" – God is merciful in that He so often keeps us from disgraceful sin. So many times in our lives (most often unknown to us), God has been behind the scenes and circumstances diverting our steps from the path of moral ruin.

If mankind was unrestrained and allowed to live without God's controlling influence, mankind would have destroyed itself long ago!

Here we find a perfect example of what is often called "the common grace of God" or "the preventative will of God."

God, for His own purposes and will, will very often prevent man's sinful nature from manifesting itself in its fullest capability.

Man by nature is selfish. Man's absorption with self (with selfish lusts, pride, and strife) is what drives him to commit acts of murder, adultery, fornication, stealing, vandalism, extortion, etc. If God did not curtail people's drive to evil, societies would languish in utter ruin. But God is involved in preventing humans from expressing the full potential of their sin nature. He employs civil government to do so (Rom. 13). And His sovereign working in the affairs of man by His Holy Spirit is the ultimate cause for order in any society (Note: He also employs angels and His children's influence).

--God restrains man's acts of sin (Gen. 20:6)

--God restrains the effects of sin

Examples:

a. Through law and government - Rom. 13
b. Through discoveries of medicines
c. Through believing Christians - I Cor. 7:14

NOTE: Believers to a large extent are the "moral conscience" of society. A society will reflect the beliefs of its people. God's children are to be salt and light - Mt. 5:13-16.

NOTE: God withheld his catastrophic judgment on Sodom because of the presence of the righteous man Lot (Gen. 18:23-32, 19:21-22)

The person of the Godhead most closely associated with the exercise of "common grace" -- and in particularly controlling sin -- is the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 6:3 - "My Spirit shall not always strive with man . . ."

God's Spirit patiently strove with man prior to the flood, but because they did not respond, but rather increased and continued in wickedness (Gen. 6:5-6), God judged that generation (v. 7).

Note: Though God in His mercy and grace does exercise control over the proneness of man's depraved heart, He is under no obligation to do so.

When men persist in sin, and rebel against the "light" God gives them (Ex: creation and conscience), God will let go of them and let them plunge into the depths of sin and subsequent ruin (Romans 1:18-32).

II Thess. 2:6-8

The Holy Spirit Who today CONTROLS sin is keeping back the Antichrist from appearing on the World scene. No doubt Satan for a long time has desired to energize a man to fulfill his diabolical plan.

V. 6 - "What withholdeth" - Lit. "The One who is restraining" (definite article plus a present, active participle that is neuter in gender, and singular in number).

The word "withhold" means to hold back, to restrain; to grab something and hold it tightly so that it does not get loose and out of control (Ex: holding on the leash of a vicious dog).

Note: God does not save that Abimelech would have sinned against her (Sarah) or him (Abraham), but against Me (God).

"...from sinning against Me" – Abimelech's sin would have been against Abraham, but ultimately against God!

All sin is against God because all sin is a violation of a law, principle, or standard that God has established (His laws are most often based on features of His character or actions. Anything that does not conform to God's nature or ways is therefore – sin).

III. God's Sovereign <u>COMMAND</u> (v.7-8)

(God authoritatively orders Abimelech to restore Abraham's wife to him)

v. 7

"He is a prophet" – The Hebrew words *"nabi"* is used here to refer to Abraham as an <u>intermediary</u>. A *nabi* would most often proclaim on behalf of God, but here Abraham would intercede between God and Abimelech.

Although none of us is a *"nabi"* or prophet in the official sense, we (as children or God) are in the unofficial sense spokesmen for God and intercessors for men.

Have you done any intercession this week? Have you exercised this special right of the believer lately on behalf of others?

v. 8

"Abimelech rose <u>early</u> in the morning" – At daybreak. When God speaks, we would be wise to immediately respond without delay.

IV. God's Sovereign <u>REBUKE</u> (v.9-13)

(God providentially rebukes Abraham through Abimelech)

v. 9

God often rebukes us through others, sometimes even from those of the world.

Abimelech asks, "What did I do to deserve this?! Why did you put me in such a predicament?"

"Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done" – Here, Abraham, the man of God, is rebuked by a lost man! The sinner rebukes the saint; the pagan reprimands the prophet.

We should not lose our testimonies so as to require rebuke from the world.

We should have testimonies that are above reproach. Our lives should never give the enemies of God cause to blaspheme (Titus 2:5, 8 - To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.)

"How could Abraham talk to his pagan neighbors about the God of truth when he himself had told a lie?" (Wiersbe, p. 90).

v. 11-13
"Abraham thought it would be more effective to deceive Abimelech than to trust God to work in the king's life" (Life Application note).

How often we are tempted to trust our own scheming and manipulation than God's power, love, and grace.

v. 11
Abraham's faults:

1) Presumption – "I thought"
(Don't prejudge a person and presume things without the facts)

2) Fear – "They will slay me"
The same fear of Gen. 12 in Egypt comes back to haunt Abraham.

Proverbs 29:25
The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.

Fear is always rooted in a lack of faith in God.

Like Abraham did, we need to learn that "the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord..."

v. 13
The sin of deception committed when Sarah was 65 years old now returns when she is 90.

What is even more frightening is the fact that Isaac, their unborn son, would one day commit the very same sin. Only in his case, Rebekah would not even be his half sister, yet he would outright lie.

The scary thought is this: What we do in moderation will most often be done by our children in excess.

Abraham's sin would be duplicated in his son many years later (Gen. 26:7-11).

"Say of me, He is my brother" – Sarah, who was a very Godly, submissive wife (1Pet. 3) should have (on this account) not submitted tot he conspiracy to lie. Whenever Abraham lied about Sarah, it never worked as he wanted it to work. It never pays to do wrong.

V. God's Sovereign GRACE (v.14-18)

(God graciously blesses Abraham through Abimelech and Abimelech through Abraham)

v. 14

God's grace is evidenced toward Abraham (v. 14-16) in the gifts given to him, and His grace is evidenced toward Abimelech (v. 17-18) in saving his life and reopening the wombs of his household.

Abimelech gave Abraham far more than God even required him to give. God said, "restore the man his wife" (v. 7), but Abimelech goes much further and showers Abraham with undeserved gifts.

"Abimelech...gave" – Peace offerings are now given to Abraham.

Because of God's grace and sovereign purpose, Abraham always comes out better in the end than he was in the beginning.

Isn't it just like our great God to turn a bad situation into a blessing? What was meant for evil turns out for good; out of the lemon, He makes lemonade!

v. 14-16

As evident by the generous gifts, this incident caused Abimelech to come to respect Abraham's God.

It is amazing how God so often can turn a tragic situation into something good.

v. 16

"A covering of the eyes" – An ancient expression describing the clearing of one's tainted testimony.

By giving such gifts to Abraham and Sarah, Abimelech is publicly acknowledging his guilt in the situation and is re-establishing Sarah's virtue. So no one could now accuse Sarah of wrongdoing, because it was Abimelech who admits his error by the peace offerings he gives. Such would silence the mouths of those who saw what happened with their eyes (their eyes are therefore covered; what they thought they saw with their eyes would be nullified by the gifts given by Abimelech).

v. 17-18

Abraham's intercession not only saved Abimelech's life but God also reopened the wombs of his house hold so that he could have descendents.