

7. Abraham's Habitual Sin

Abraham's Growing Faith

Genesis 20:1-18

Warm-up Question: What personality traits or habits have you inherited from either of your parents?

¹Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ²and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. ³But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." ⁴Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." ⁶Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die" (Genesis 20:1-7).

Scripture does not tell us why Abraham chose to move on to the region of the Negev. We do not know if Abraham's relationship with Lot was restored, or if he even knew where Lot had settled. They did not join together after the disaster. Feelings of personal loss may have overwhelmed Abraham at this time. For whatever reason, he decided to leave the Oaks of Mamre and travel to Gerar where old habits repeat themselves. How often do you find that temptations come at a point of weakness when you are most vulnerable? It is at these low times in our lives when we need to be especially aware of old habits and tendencies, lest they creep back into our lives.□

Abraham's Deceitful Bent

In the passage we are studying today, we read something of Abraham's life he had not yet conquered. There was a bent in his character, an inclination to a particular sin, the sin of deceit. At least twenty-five years previously he agreed with Sarah that wherever the couple went, they would agree to deceive whoever they were with by saying that they were sister and brother. They did this, thinking they were protecting each other instead of trusting God to protect them both. This same lie caused so much trouble while in Egypt, that Pharaoh had told them to leave his country (Genesis 12:11-19).

We find it hard to conceive how this same habitual sin could still be at work in Abraham's life. After all, he had witnessed God's protection and trusted God many times up to this point. He had a history with God and had even been visited by angels and by the Lord Himself. Why would he do the same thing again? Unless a bent character trait is owned as sin and renounced (formally declared as abandoned), repented of (a change of mind and direction of life), and forsaken, it can repeat in a person's life and his family too. We see an example of this bent in Abraham's character happening in his son, Isaac. At the time of Abraham's deceit over Abimelek, Isaac was not even born yet, but he repeated the same sin with his wife, Rebekah, more than forty years

later (Genesis 26:6-10). The Abimelech you read in the passage below most scholars believe to be a title, such as Pharaoh, or Caesar, rather than a personal name:

A Bad Act is Easy to Follow!

This same bent of deceitfulness was in Isaac's son, Jacob, Abraham's grandson. He deliberately deceived his father, Isaac, to steal the blessing and the birthright from his brother, Esau. Esau saw no value in the blessing and birthright, and was willing to sell for a bowl of stew. Perhaps that's why God allowed it to take place. If we do not place value on spiritual things, the Lord will enable those things to slip from our fingers and use someone else for His glory.

³⁵But he said, "Your brother came **deceitfully** and took your blessing." ³⁶Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has **deceived me** these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" (Genesis 27:35-36).

We can look further down Abraham's lineage and see that Jacob's sons also had the same bent in character. Jacob's sons used deceit to weaken the family of Shechem by causing them to be circumcised. They then went and killed them in revenge for raping and defiling their sister, Dinah:

¹³Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied **deceitfully** as they spoke to Shechem and his father, Hamor. ¹⁴They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us (Genesis 34:13-14).

This deceitfulness and murder, incidentally, caused Jacob grief (Genesis 34:30). Habitual sin has a way of affecting you long after the initial act unless the cycle is broken. Lastly, we see how the sons of Jacob deceived their father after they sold Joseph into slavery. They deliberately lied to Jacob, misleading him into thinking an animal had killed his favorite son, Joseph:

³¹Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³²They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." ³³He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces" (Genesis 37:31-33).

We can only imagine what grief Jacob suffered, and at the hands of his children! However, his sins and shortcomings were the very things that brought all of the trouble back to him. Are you starting to get the picture? It is a bitter cycle that has affected families down through the ages.

[Do you think that your personality traits are inherited or learned? Share your thoughts.](#)□

We Reproduce What We Are

One of the first things we learn as parents are that our children will often copy our words and habits, both good and bad. Sometimes it can even be traits we do not perceive in ourselves. I

noticed that I usually hold my breath when I am concentrating on something, and guess what, the same habit was observed in my daughter.

We learn from our parents, as well as other authority figures around us, and from life experience. We can only learn so much from teachers, but there is more to learn by watching the person. How often have you heard that actions speak louder than words? There is no doubt that what our children see us do speaks louder than what we teach them. This law works in a spiritual sense as well as the physical. And if we don't conquer our sins, those same spiritual traits will reach down into our children's lives and even further, into their children's lives. For example, J. Oswald Chambers, in his book "*the Spiritual Clinic*" tells of the lives of the Jukes vs. Edward's family.

The father of Jonathan Edwards was a minister, and his mother was the daughter of a clergyman. Among their descendants were fourteen presidents of colleges, more than one hundred college professors, more than one hundred lawyers, thirty judges, sixty physicians, more than a hundred clergymen, missionaries and theology professors, and about sixty authors. There is scarcely any great American industry that has not had one of his family among its chief promoters. Such is the product of one American Christian Family, reared under the most favorable conditions. The contrast is presented in the Jukes family, which could not be made to study and would not work, and is said to have cost the state of New York a million dollars. Their entire record is one of pauperism and crime, insanity and imbecility. Among their twelve hundred known descendants, three hundred and ten were professional paupers, four hundred and forty were physically wrecked by their own wickedness, sixty were habitual thieves, one hundred and thirty were convicted criminals, fifty-five were victims of impurity, only twenty learned a trade (and ten of those learned it in a state prison), and this notorious family produced seven murderers.

The good news is that we can redeem the situation by our actions. It is not too late to turn the tide and decide which traits will mark our households. Regardless of our economic standing and abilities, we can demonstrate to others what we value by how we live.

What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? What specific trait would you like to pass down, or if you do not presently have children, in what specific ways would you like to influence others?

God Confronts Abimelek

It is possible that all Abimelek wanted was a political alliance for we know that Sarah was close to ninety years old. Abraham was a prosperous tribal chieftain with the blessing of God on him. Perhaps Abimelek sought to tie Abraham to the area by being married to Sarah. He was deceived into thinking Sarah was Abraham's sister. □

God was very gracious to Abimelek. The Lord knew the whole situation that was going on. He comes to the Philistine king in a dream at night and spoke to him about the entire situation. He warned him that he was as good as dead because he has taken another man's wife into his

household to be his wife. John Courson, the Bible teacher, said that the Hebrew words translated “as good as dead,” means to be dead sexually; impotent. God had made the whole family infertile. It is possible that this was what was intimated by the Lord’s words to Abimelek that He knew that Abimelek was innocent, saying;

Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her (v. 6).

Perhaps all sexual urges were gone from Abimelek while Sarah was in his household. God is well able to keep his people in all kinds of situations if we ask him. Why would Abraham have allowed this to go on? Why did he not speak up for his wife when Abimelek asked Sarah to be a part of his household? Knowing the promises of God to both of them, why would Sarah have consented to the deception? There is a lot the Scriptures do not tell us. One thing we do know is that Abraham and Sarah allowed fear to control them at this point. Their fear of man was more prominent than their fear of the Lord. And yet, in His mercy for all in this situation, God steps in by speaking directly to the king.

I love this about the Bible, for it never draws a curtain over God's people who are heroes in the Scriptures. It tells us the complete picture of their growth on their way to be men and women of God. In them, we can see our weaknesses and faults. If we were to call them men of God to their faces, I'm sure their response would be, “I’m not a great man of God, just a man of a Great God.” There is hope for all of us when we look at the great man of faith, Abraham. He’s a man of a Great God, just as you and I.

When Abimelek confronted Abraham as to what he saw in his kingdom that would lead him to do such a thing, he revealed a greater understanding of God than Abraham realized. Abimelek's concern was about the lives that could have been damaged by Abraham's sin. He used words such as "us" and "me and my kingdom." Sometimes people outside the realm of faith exhibit more moral character and opposition to sin than the people of God, a sad state of affairs. In this case, King Abimelek displayed a fear of God. This godly fear shows us that God can use whomever He chooses. At times, God has to use those outside His kingdom to constrain sin.

Abraham’s reply to his reasoning is disconcerting:

¹¹Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ ¹²Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother””

How wrong Abraham was. There was a fear of God in Philistine country, for Abimelek’s view was that both himself and his kingdom would have been exposed to the wrath of God if he had fallen guilty of the sin of taking another man's wife to bed. Rulers should know that as goes the king, so go his subjects. Whatever sin the king allows, the people will also practice as well. It is incredible that the king was so patient in his dealings with Abraham. Remember, that God gave

him an ultimatum: “Now then, return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours” (v. 7.) Abimelek sent Abraham away with a blessing, but how it diminished Abraham’s testimony of being a man of integrity. Thank God his life did not end there!

Do you see a compromise with the truth in the answer that Abraham gave Abimelek? How did he justify his deception? What consequences do you think Abraham and Sarah may have suffered due to this lie?

God’s Grace to Abimelek

All was not lost because of Abraham's lapse into habitual sin. The remainder of the account drips with grace. Abimelek showered Abraham with gifts. In offering Abraham the land, the king removed Abraham's alien status. The thousand shekels of silver was an excellent monetary gift. Fifty shekels was the most offered for a bride at the time and the amount given was the price of twenty brides! Fantastic grace met Abraham's folly. And grace also went out to Abimelek. “**Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife**” (vv. 17-18). Perhaps this healing grace was a demonstration and precursor of grace to some in that Philistine village. They saw the awesome power of God, bringing hope to Sarah as well. Some years earlier Sarah had said, "Behold, now, the Lord has prevented [literally, "closed"] me from bearing children (Genesis 16:2). Certainly, the Lord could open Sarah's womb just as He did for the Philistine women. Sarah, take heart—laughter is coming soon!”

We do not know how long Sarah was in Abimelek’s household before God intervened. However long it was, it must have been distressing for both Abraham and Sarah to be apart, and to know that it was their own doing. This account speaks to us regarding the patience and longsuffering of God toward Abraham and Sarah. Even after Abraham’s lie, God still referred to Abraham as a prophet when He spoke to Abimelek. Incidentally, this is the first occasion that we see the word prophet used of one of God's people. Though Abraham’s sin cannot be excused, the incident does show us that God did not withdraw His grace because of failure.

Do Not Lean on Your Understanding. □

We look at this story and wonder why Abraham thought he needed to lie to protect them both. However, once again, we need to remember that we have the advantage of reading the whole story and see the outcome. Abraham had to walk this journey step by step, and the danger must have been genuine for him to feel this deception was necessary. He assessed the situation and came up with the wrong conclusion. We can easily do this too when we limit ourselves by our perspective. We can also come up with the wrong conclusions instead of trusting God and seeking His wisdom.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

As we finish this story, you could end by taking a few moments to apply this Scripture to your own life. Is there a situation or an area of your life where you need to trust in God's wisdom? Take time to submit this situation to the Lord and trust Him to guide you. He promises that He will make your paths straight!

Prayer: Father, would you shine your light into my heart that I might see areas of my life that are places where I habitually fall into the same sin. Please help me overcome so that I might be a good example not only to my family but also to those around me. Amen!

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