

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 20

GENESIS 20:1-2 - ABRAHAM IN GERAR

ABRAHAM MOVES FROM THE OAKS OF MAMRE TOWARDS THE NEGEV AND SETTLES BETWEEN KADESH AND SHUR, ENDING UP IN A PLACE CALLED GERAR. NEGEV IS THE NAME FOR THE SOUTHERN DESERT REGION IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT INITIATED OR CAUSED THIS MOVE. WHEN HE SOJOURNED IN GERAR, HE FOUND HIMSELF IN A SIMILAR PREDICAMENT. THIS SHOULD REMIND US OF THE PREVIOUS INCIDENT IN GENESIS 12 WHEN ABRAHAM AND SARAH WENT TO EGYPT AND SARAH FOUND HERSELF TAKEN IN BY PHAROAH. HERE WE GO AGAIN.

GENESIS 20:3-7 - GOD SPEAKS TO ABIMELECH

WE READ HERE ABOUT AN INTERESTING EXCHANGE BETWEEN GOD AND THE PAGAN KING OF GERAR, ABIMELECH. AS A QUICK TEXTUAL NOTE, ABIMELECH IS PROBABLY A TITLE, LIKE PHAROAH, AS IT APPEARS A NUMBER OF TIMES IN THE HEBREWS SCRIPTURES. (*ABI-MELECH* IS TWO HEBREW WORDS: *ABI*(MY FATHER), *MELECH*(KING).

ABIMELECH HAS TAKEN SARAH INTO HIS HOUSE, PRESUMABLY TO MAKE HER HIS WIFE OR CONCUBINE. GOD SPEAKS TO ABIMELECH IN A DREAM AND CONFRONTS HIM BEFORE ANY OF THIS CAN HAPPEN. ABIMELECH IS SCARED STRAIGHT BUT ALSO RESPONDS -

"LORD, WILL YOU DESTROY AN INNOCENT NATION? DIDN'T ABRAHAM TELL ME, 'SHE IS MY SISTER'? AND SHE HERSELF SAID, 'YES, HE IS MY BROTHER.' I ACTED IN COMPLETE INNOCENCE! MY HANDS ARE CLEAN." (GENESIS 20:4-5 NLT)

GOD RESPONDS TO ABIMELECH THAT HE KNOWS THE FACTS AND THAT HE IS BEING SPARED FROM JUDGMENT BY GOD'S INTERVENTION, BEFORE HE VIOLATES SARAH. GOD DIRECTS ABIMELECH TO RETURN SARAH TO ABRAHAM AND ASK FOR ABRAHAM TO PRAY FOR HIM. AS YOU READ THIS YOU PROBABLY ARE THINKING - GEEZ, WHAT A WILD STORY - IT SEEMS LIKE ABRAHAM CAUSED ALL OF THIS TROUBLE, AND YET ABRAHAM IS NOW GOING TO INTERCEDE FOR ABIMELECH! YEP. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE READING HERE!

IN FACT, GENESIS 20:7 USES THE FIRST USAGE OF THE WORD PROPHET (*NABI*) IN THE BIBLE AND IT IS IN REFERENCE TO ABRAHAM. DESPITE ALL OF THE MESSINESS OF THIS SITUATION, GOD FAVORS ABRAHAM. ABRAHAM HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE LORD, AND EVEN THOUGH SINS AND FOOLISHNESS REMAINS, HE IS GOD'S MAN.

THE USAGE OF "PROPHET" HERE IS LIKELY IN REFERENCE TO THE INTERCEDING THAT ABRAHAM DID ON BEHALF OF LOT REGARDING SODOM. BEYOND JUST THE IDEA THAT PROPHET KNOWS THE FUTURE OR GIVES PROPHETIC PRONOUNCEMENTS, PROPHETS WERE PEOPLE WHO WOULD STAND BETWEEN GOD AND THE PEOPLE. AND THAT'S BECOMING ABRAHAM'S REPUTATION. AND SO HERE WE HAVE OUR FIRST BIBLICAL PROPHET - "PROPHET ABRAHAM"

GENESIS 20:8-13 - ABIMELECH CONFRONTS ABRAHAM

ABIMELECH RESPONDS TO THE WORD OF THE LORD QUICKLY AND RIGHTLY. HE CALLS FOR ABRAHAM AND CONFRONTS HIM ABOUT THIS SITUATION. HE ASKS "WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME". ABRAHAM EXPLAINS THAT *TECHNICALLY* THERE IS A WAY THAT SARAH COULD BE CONSIDERED HIS SISTER. (HIS FATHER WAS ALSO ABRAHAM'S FATHER, BUT THEY HAD DIFFERENT MOTHERS). BUT THE PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM WAS HUSBAND AND WIFE - NOT BROTHER AND SISTER! SO THERE WAS AN ELEMENT OF TRUTH IN ABRAHAM'S STORY, BUT IT WAS NOT A FULLY HONEST AND TRANSPARENT WORD.

BUT THIS SECTION ALSO REVEALS THE *REASON* WHY ABRAHAM DID WHAT HE DID. TO ABIMELECH'S QUESTION "WHY DID YOU DO THIS", ABRAHAM ADMITS:

"BECAUSE I THOUGHT, SURELY THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD IN THIS PLACE, AND THEY WILL KILL ME BECAUSE OF MY WIFE.
(GENESIS 20:11)

ABRAHAM'S REPLY SEEMS TO SHOW THAT HE WAS AFRAID AND THAT HIS FEAR PUSHED HIM TO LIE. INSTEAD OF TRUSTING GOD IN WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS A "GODLESS PLACE", HE TOOK MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS TO TRY AND KEEP HIMSELF SAFE. THIS IS A REPEATING CHARACTER DEFECT OF ABRAHAM. THIS TIME, HE WAS AFRAID AND SO HE LIED. HE DID THE SAME THING IN EGYPT. ONE COULD CONCLUDE THAT WHEN THE PRESSURE IS MOUNTING TO HAVE AN HEIR, HE TOOK MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HAND WITH HAGAR AND ISHMAEL. WHEN HE FEELS PRESSURE, HE REACTS TO THE PRESSURE IN FOOLISH WAYS RATHER THAN TURNING TO GOD.

CAN YOU RELATE TO THIS? WHEN YOU'RE FEELING THE PRESSURE OF OTHER PEOPLE, JOB SITUATIONS, FEAR, ANXIETY, WORRY, DEADLINES, PERSECUTION, OR OTHER THINGS IN LIFE - WHAT DO YOU DO? ARE YOU ABLE TO KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON GOD AND GET DIRECTION FROM HIM OR DOES THE PRESSURE PUSH YOU TO SIN BECAUSE YOU'RE SO OVERWHELMED YOU FEEL LIKE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER CHOICE?

THE KEY TO REACTING IN GODLY WAYS WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON IS TO PREPARE YOURSELF WHEN THE PRESSURE IS OFF. CULTIVATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH PRAYER AND HIS WORD IS SO IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN WHEN "EVERYTHING IS GOOD" IN YOUR LIFE. WHAT THIS DOES IS PUTS GOD'S WORD AND HIS PERSPECTIVE IN YOUR LIFE AND HEART SO THAT WHEN YOU ARE SQUEEZED, GOD'S WORD AND PERSPECTIVE IS WHAT COMES OUT.

GENESIS 20:14-18 - THINGS ARE MADE RIGHT

GOD BLESSES ABRAHAM THROUGH THIS MESSY STORY. ABIMELECH RELEASES SARAH TO ABRAHAM AND ALSO INCLUDES REPARATIONS IN THE DEAL (SHEEP, OXEN, SERVANTS, AND 1000 PIECES OF SILVER!). THE IRONY OF ABRAHAM'S CONFESSED FEAR ("THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD IN THIS PLACE") IS THAT ABIMELECH'S RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING IN THE DREAM SHOWED A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD!

"ABIMELECH'S GENEROSITY, ON TOP OF HIS INNOCENCE, CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH ABRAHAM'S SELF-SERVING DECEPTION REGARDING THE TRUTH ABOUT SARAH. THE KING'S ACTIONS ARE A VERY PUBLIC AFFIRMATION THAT HE HAS NOT ACTED INAPPROPRIATELY TOWARD SARAH, AND THUS HE IS NOT THE FATHER OF ANY CHILDREN SHE MAY HAVE. (ESV STUDY BIBLE, GENESIS 20:14-16)"

ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR ABIMELECH AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AND GOD BLESSES THEM (FERTILITY RESTORED). AND WITH THAT GENESIS 20 ENDS WITH ABRAHAM BACK ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

IT IS REMARKABLE TO READ THE STORY OF ABRAHAM CHAPTER BY CHAPTER AND VERSE BY VERSE. IN READING THE RECORDS IN THIS WAY WE REALLY SEE THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THIS MAN. FAITHFUL, COURAGEOUS AND TRUSTING ON ONE PAGE - FLAWED, COWARDLY AND TRICKY ON THE NEXT. IT IS SUCH A WINDOW IN THE HEART OF ABRAHAM THE PATRIARCH OF FAITH BUT IT IS ALSO A WINDOW INTO THE HEART OF GOD AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANITY.

IT'S EASY FOR US TO FORGET THAT ABRAHAM WAS SUCH A FLAWED CHARACTER WHEN WE READ HIM LISTED IN HEBREWS 11 OR HEAR HIM SPOKEN OF IN SCRIPTURES WHICH SHINE A GREAT LIGHT ON HIS LIFE. MAKE NO MISTAKE, ABRAHAM WAS A GREAT MAN AND IS ONE TO HIGHLY ESTEEM. BUT WE OFTEN (WRONGLY) THINK THAT BECAUSE OUR LIVES AREN'T FLAWLESS, WE CAN'T BE USED BY GOD TODAY. SOME WILL ALSO CONCLUDE THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE WERE "DIFFERENT" THAN WE ARE TODAY. THAT THEY HAD A SPECIAL CONNECTION WITH GOD OR SOMETHING THAT ALLOWED THEM TO BE WHO THEY WERE AND DO WHAT THEY DID.

YET ABRAHAM WAS UP ONE DAY AND DOWN THE NEXT. THIS IDEA DOESN'T COMMEND OR JUSTIFY SIN IN OUR LIVES - GOD DIDN'T COMMEND OR OVERLOOK ABRAHAM'S. BUT WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE AND THE GREAT "HEROES" OF FAITH AND SEE OURSELVES IN THE STORY MORE THAN WE MIGHT. ABRAHAM HAD GOOD DAYS AND BAD. HE WAS LOCKED IN AND SOLD OUT AND HE ALSO HAD DOUBTS AND FEARS. YET THE TRAJECTORY OF HIS LIFE WAS GOD-WARD. HE NEVER QUIT ON GOD, HE NEVER TURNED FROM HIM. WHEN HE FELL, HE GOT BACK UP. WHEN HE DOUBTED, HE WENT TO GOD WITH HIS QUESTIONS. THIS IS WHAT A HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD LOOKS LIKE.

GENESIS 20 TELLS THE STORY OF GOD INTERVENING ON ABRAHAM'S BEHALF IN SPITE OF ABRAHAM'S NOT SO BRIGHT DECISIONS. SARAH HAS ALREADY BEEN TAKEN BY ABIMELECH AND THEN GOD APPEARS TO HIM IN A DREAM. IT IS ALL GOD'S DOING THAT SARAH IS RESCUED - AND MORE CRITICAL FOR OUR COVENANT STORY - SARAH IS NOT IMPREGNATED BY ABIMELECH!

GOD'S HELP IS NOT DEPENDANT ON ABRAHAM'S PERFORMANCE, BUT IS EXTENDED OUT OF MERCY AND IN VIEW OF GOD'S WILL BEING DONE. HAVE YOU HEARD OF ANOTHER GOD LIKE THE LORD?! ABRAHAM, SARAH AND HUMANITY IN GENERAL STRAY AWAY FROM WHERE THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN, FIND THEMSELVES IN SITUATIONS THEY CAN'T GET THEMSELVES OUT OF AND GOD STEPS IN (IN SPITE OF THEM) TO SAVE THEM.

THIS IS THE SALVATION OF OUR GOD. HE BECOMES OUR SAVIOR BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE AND MERCY, NOT BECAUSE OF OUR DEEDS.

TITUS 3:5 - HE SAVED US, NOT ON THE BASIS OF DEEDS WHICH WE HAVE DONE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY.

HE DID THIS FOR ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 20 AND HE HAS DONE THIS FOR US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. THANKS BE TO GOD.