

Genesis 20:1-18
The Deadly Price of Deceit

Go back in your mind to when you first committed your life to Christ

- For some of you, this wasn't too long ago
- For many of you, it has been years
- For others, you have yet to commit your life to Christ

When you first trusted Christ, everything was new

- The Bible made sense for the first time
- The Church was precious
- The fellowship with other believers was priceless

But amid all of these great blessings, you began to see the sin in your own heart

- With resolve, you met it with tenacity and zeal
- You hated the fact that you continued to sin

At some point in our lives, I believe that all of us have felt very discouraged over the amount of sin that still remains in our lives

- Even though Paul reminds us that we have been crucified with Christ (cf. Gal 2:20), we continue to make sinful choices that have disastrous consequences in our lives

What is most frustrating to me as a believer is when I see the same sins continue to emerge in my life

- Perhaps you can relate to that as well

I can't tell you how many times I come to the Lord's Table, examining my heart

- And what I confess seems like an echo from the previous time of Communion

If we are all honest, that cyclical pattern of sin in our lives is something that is deeply disturbing

- If it doesn't bother you that you sin so much, then perhaps you should ask the Lord why this is so!

As a new believer, everything is new

- We were all immature, not knowing how best to handle certain situations

But as we grow in the faith, we know better

- Or at least we should

If some of what I have just said hits home in your heart, then you will benefit greatly from this morning's message

- We will see another believer struggle with repetitive sin in his life
- And we will see how he responds to it

Let's read Genesis 20:1-18

In this chapter, we return to look at the life of Abraham

- Specifically, we will see him repeat an error he made way back in chapter 12
- Some 25-30 years prior

We will notice four (4) observations of a cause-and-effect study of sin

- One act of deceit causes an avalanche of sin to ensue

Specifically, we will observe:¹

- The complication that sin brings (20:1-2)
- The intervention that the Lord initiates (20:3-7)
- The vindication that the king offers (20:8-16)
- The intercession that Abraham makes (20:17-18)

I. The complication that sin brings (20:1-2)

¹Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar.

For the first time in many years, we see Abraham on the move again

In chapters 11, 12, and 13 of Genesis, Abraham seemed to move on a regular basis

- His father, Terah, moved him and his wife, Sarai to Haran (11:31-32)
- After his father died, Abram took Sarai and Lot to Canaan (12:4-6)
- From Canaan, Abram traveled to Bethel (12:8-9)
- Due to a famine in the land, Abram traveled to Egypt (12:10-20)
- After the events in Egypt, Abram went back to Bethel where he had previously established an altar (13:1)
- The final destination brought Abram to Hebron, near the oaks of Mamre (13:18)

From the end of chapter 13 until to the present chapter, we have not observed Abraham move from the area of Hebron

But 20:1 tells us that “Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev”

- The language takes us back to those earlier chapters when Abraham was moving so frequently

Specifically, the language of “Abraham journeyed” takes us back to chapter 12²

- We know that Abram went down to Egypt because of a famine in the land of Canaan
- “And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. ¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (12:9-10)

There is no mention of a famine here in chapter 20

- So why is Abraham on the move again?
- Why is he moving toward “the Negev” again?

Frankly, the Text doesn’t give any reasons

- Perhaps Abraham’s livestock needed some new pasture
- Perhaps Abraham wanted to separate himself from the cities that had just been destroyed by the Lord

But we do know that Abraham headed southward and “sojourned in Gerar”

- This is the same word used back in chapter 12 when Abram desired to “sojourn” in Egypt

¹ I have adapted the very helpful outline found in Allen P. Ross’ *Creation & Blessing*, 369.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 2, 69.

To “sojourn” means to dwell in an area that is not your home

- It means to live in an area that you are considered an outsider

In Genesis 19, during the confrontation between Lot and the angry mob, you might remember how the men of Sodom told Lot, “**This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge**” (19:9, emphasis mine)

- This is the same word
- Lot was an outsider who was living in the city of Sodom

Once again, we don’t know why Abraham left Hebron and traveled southward

- But we do know by the very verb that is used, that he would be treated and viewed as an outsider
- Just like he was treated and viewed during his time in Egypt

Gerar was the capital city of the land of the Philistines, located near the border of Egypt³

- We know that these were not followers of the LORD

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

Sometime after arriving in Gerar, Abraham speaks of Sarah his wife as “**my sister**”

- Now Moses is very clear here
- Notice that he says, “**Abraham said of Sarah his wife**” (emphasis mine)

Once again, Moses is deliberately causing our minds to go back to chapter 12

- Chapter 12 informed us that, “**when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, ‘See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; ¹² and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, “This is his wife”; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you’**” (12:11-13)

This was early on in the journey of faith

- Abram was immature in many ways
- Abram had yet to see God’s good hand of protection, provision, and providence

So he lied about his relationship with Sarai

- That’s right
- Deceit is a lie since it holds back the entire truth

Abram was *fearful* that the Egyptians would kill him

- So he asked Sarai to join in the lie and deception

The result of the Egyptian deception was that Sarai was taken into Pharaoh’s house

- But the LORD struck Pharaoh’s house with great plagues because of this sin (12:17)

After rebuking Abram for not telling the truth, Pharaoh told him to leave his country

Fast-forward about 25-30 years

- Abraham is once again traveling south
- Abraham is once again being deceitful
- Sarah is once again taken away from her husband to live with another man

³ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 360.

Can you see a pattern here?

- 30 years of God's faithfulness, provision, and protection have not changed the perspective of Abraham in this regard

Just like before, Sarah was removed from her husband

- And she was now living with the king of Gerar

This creates a problem

- Not only has Abraham sinned by being deceitful and lying
- But there is a bigger problem relating to the birth of their child

The Lord had promised Abraham and Sarah in chapter 18, "**Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son**" (18:14)

- One year from that conversation, Sarah would have a son
- Nine months of that year would be the pregnancy
- That only leaves three months

Perhaps some of that three months is spent with another man

- There is a real threat to the LORD's promise!

The Lord must intervene!

- And that is exactly what we see take place in the next few verses

II. The intervention that the LORD initiates (20:3-7)

³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married."

When God makes a promise, He will bring it to pass

- It may not be the way that *we* think He should act
- But He will be faithful to His promises

God appears to the king of Gerar in a dream at night

- We are told that this name is Abimelech
- Literally, the name means "the king is my father"⁴
- Most likely, it was a title of the office, not his personal name, since there are other kings by this same name

God's Word to this king is very short and clear, "**Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married**"

- *Can you imagine being told that by God?*

No doubt Abimelech knew exactly what woman God was speaking of

- We know that he has plenty of other women in his harem
- We will see more of that later in the chapter

To take a woman who was married was a serious offense

- Adultery merited the death penalty in the ancient world⁵

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 138.

As we have seen in Genesis, a wife is more than just the property of her husband

- She is one flesh with him!

⁴ Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even *though* blameless? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.”

Moses informs us that “**Abimelech had not come near her**”

- There had not been any physical relationship between the two

Knowing this, the king said, “**Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even *though* blameless?**”

- We notice that the king appealed to God’s justice
- This is much like Abraham who asked the Lord back in chapter 18, “**Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?**” (18:23)

Abimelech knew that he was innocent toward Sarah

- He continues by saying, “**Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this**” (20:5)

The king tells the Lord that he has “**integrity**” and “**innocence**” as it relates to the charge of stealing a married woman

- In a word, he is claiming that he was ignorant of her married status

Yet ignorance is not an excuse with God⁶

- He still holds mankind responsible for their actions

The apostle Paul would state in 1 Timothy 1, “**I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus.” (1:12-14, emphasis mine)**

Isn’t it sad that Abimelech can claim integrity which Abraham and Sarah failed to display?

- The king even quotes the very words of Abraham and Sarah back to the Lord!

Keep in mind that all of this took place in a dream at night

- This dialogue took place in a real dream

⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.”

After Abimelech claimed innocence and integrity, God responds to him, “**Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this**”

- The Lord affirms his integrity
- The Lord affirms his innocence

⁵ Wenham, 70.

⁶ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol. 1B, 252.*

But the next statement of the Lord is shocking, “and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her”

- The Lord informs Abimelech that He had prevented the king from sinning that way

So the king could not take credit for his integrity

- Perhaps God was insinuating that he might have sinned this way, had the Lord not intervened

Did you notice that the Lord told the king, “I also kept you from sinning against Me”?

- Not, “from sinning against *Abraham*”
- But “sinning against Me”

The sin of adultery is first and foremost against God

- After sinning with Bathsheba, David pens the words of Psalm 51
- In a heart-broken state of repentance, he confesses, “Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge” (51:1-4)

Did you catch that?

- David said, “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned”

In reality, David had sinned against a number of people

- Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband – deception
- Bathsheba – adultery
- His army – laziness and lack of godly leadership and example
- His own conscience – he proceeded to sin when he should have stopped

But David sees his sin as first and foremost against the LORD

In essence, *every* sin is first and foremost against God

- He is holy and every act of sin is a deviation from His perfection and righteousness

This is something that we shouldn’t just gloss over

- God is gracious, at times, to prevent us from sinning in certain ways
- At other times, He allows us to reap what we sow

Think about Lot

- God had, no doubt, protected him from adopting the sin of homosexuality from those in Sodom
- This was God’s grace

Yet, God did not completely safeguard Lot from all sin

- Lot displayed lack of wisdom, lack of devotion to his family, and lack of loyalty to the LORD

I have seen this principle in my life, time and time again

- Sometimes God will protect me from certain sins
- Other times, God will allow me to see the consequences of my actions

The first is an example of His grace and protection of me as His child

- The second is a demonstration of His discipline, evidence that I am, indeed, His child

In no way whatsoever could King Abimelech claim total credit for his integrity and innocence toward Sarah

- He had obviously taken her away from Abraham
- God knew his heart

⁷ Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.

Just because the king had not acted improperly toward Sarah didn't mean that he was totally off the hook

- He still had a married woman in his harem

God tells the king, **“restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours”**

Abimelech had a simple choice

- He could obey the Lord and live
- Or he could disobey the Lord and die

God told this king that Sarah's husband was a **“prophet”**

- This is the first use of this word in the Scriptures
- This is the only time this word is used in the book of Genesis

In essence, this Hebrew word for **“prophet”** implies a spokesman for God⁷

- The idea of foretelling future events is not the primary meaning in this passage

Also, part of Abraham's role as a prophet was to intercede for others

- That is exactly what the Lord told King Abimelech

The king's salvation lies in the husband of the woman whom he had taken⁸

There was a death threat over the king regarding Sarah

- The Lord told him in verse three that he was a **“dead man”**

God obviously wants this king to take His Word seriously

- He wasn't kidding

The Lord told the king that if he failed to obey His Word, then **“you shall surely die, you and all who are yours”**

- This expression is very similar to what God told Adam and Eve back in the Garden⁹
- **“but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die”** (2:17, emphasis mine)

Oftentimes, God requires us to put our faith into action¹⁰

- We can say almost anything
- But we will follow through?

⁷ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 212.

⁸ Mathews, 254.

⁹ Ross, 372.

¹⁰ Wenham, 71.

How would the king respond?

- Would he obey the Lord?

III. The vindication that the king offers (20:8-16)

⁸ So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened.

King Abimelech quickly obeyed the Lord

- He “arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing”

Unlike Lot, the King did not hesitate

- Once again, how sad that an unbelieving king would respond better than righteous Lot and Abraham

When Abimelech told his servants what had happened, they “were greatly frightened”

- It wasn't just the life of the king that was affected
- God had promised that “you shall surely die, you and all who are yours”

The choice of the king would affect so many other people

⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?”

Still in a state of shock over his dream, Abimelech speaks to Abraham

- In essence, the king rebukes Abraham for his lack of honesty and integrity
- Because of Abraham's deceit, the king and all the inhabitants of Gerar had suffered

What a lesson Abraham was learning...*again!!!*

Many of the comments that Abimelech made to Abraham were similar to what Pharaoh told Abraham back in chapter 12

- Both kings suffered because of the dishonesty of Abraham and Sarah

¹¹ And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife. ¹² Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; ¹³ and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, ‘This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.””

Now Abraham speaks for the first time since his deceit

- His reasons for being deceitful are found to be misinformed

He gives two (2) pitiful reasons for his lying

- He didn't think that the people of Gerar would fear God
- He feared that the people of Gerar would kill him because of Sarah

It's interesting that both excuses revolve around fear¹¹

- He didn't think they would fear God (as he claimed to)
- He feared their reaction to him being the husband of Sarah

In a futile attempt to justify his actions, he tells the family history about how Sarah was, in fact, his sister

- Half-sister would be the better term
- But this was not worthy of justifying his actions, however

Abraham is the father of the faithful

- Yet he once again resembles Adam who shifted the blame when confronted over sin¹²

Even beyond this, Abraham tells us something that we didn't know up to this point

- He says in verse 13 that this deceit was something they had arranged beforehand
- It was their default strategy and scheme

This is the second time that Genesis has told of this deceitful plan

- Could they have used it at other times with other people?
- Perhaps, but God did not record those instances

¹⁴ Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please."

After hearing Abraham utter his pitiful excuses, King Abimelech gives gifts to him!

- Talk about grace!
- Talk about undeserved blessings!

Pharaoh gave Abraham gifts as well, "sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels" (12:16)

- King Abimelech gives "sheep and oxen and male and female servants"
- The only difference is the absence of donkeys and camels from the king of Gerar

Another contrast between Pharaoh and the king of Gerar emerges in this Text

- Pharaoh banished Abram from Egypt, escorting them out of the country
- Abimelech, however, invited Abraham to stay in the country, settling wherever he chose

God was blessing Abraham far more than he deserved

- As an outsider, he shouldn't have had free choice of land
- As a deceiver, he shouldn't have received any gifts

¹⁶ And to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared."

The king also had some words for Sarah who had obviously never revealed the truth of her marriage

- In addition to the livestock that he gave to Abraham, he also gave 1000 pieces of silver

¹¹ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 82.

¹² Kidner, 138.

This was a ridiculously large amount of money

- A laborer in Babylon would earn ½ shekel a month
- It would take him 167 years to earn 1000 pieces of silver¹³
- This shows just how rich this king was

We can't miss the biting sarcasm that the king uses toward Sarah, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver” (emphasis mine)

- Even though he now knows about the marriage between Abraham and Sarah, the king uses the same language that Sarah had used originally to describe her relationship with Abraham
- “brother” – not “husband”

For the second time, Sarah was restored to her husband

- But the credit could not go to Abraham or to Abimelech
- The praise for this goes to the Lord alone¹⁴

IV. The intercession that Abraham makes (20:17-18)

¹⁷ And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

In Genesis 12, God had promised Abraham, “And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3)

- Abimelech had blessed Abraham with gifts
- God was about to bless the king

Back in verse 7, the Lord told king Abimelech, “restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live”

- Abraham had originally deceived the king and caused many problems
- Now Abraham would pray for the king and bring about healing in his household

For quite some time, God “had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife”

- With the wombs of the women closed, the king of Gerar wouldn't father any more children
- God had already issued a death threat to him if he didn't return Sarah

So the king faced the real possibility of his entire kingdom coming to an end

- But he avoided that through obedience to God's Word

Abraham's prayers of intercession have proven to be effective

- They have caused Lot to be rescued from the place of destruction
- They have also caused the women of Gerar to conceive once again

The chapter ends on a note of mystery

- Abraham is called upon to pray for the king and the inhabitants of Gerar
- When he prayed, the wombs of the women were opened again

¹³ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 287.

¹⁴ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 153.

Sarah had claimed in 16:2, “Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her”

- The word for “prevented” is the same Hebrew word for “closed”¹⁵

The irony and mystery is that Sarah has been barren her entire life

- Why would God allow Abraham’s prayers to be effective toward unbelieving women and not be effective toward his own wife?

As with many things in our lives as believers, we won’t know the full answer until we stand before the Lord

But the good news is that God was faithful to His promise to Abraham and Sarah

- God would open her womb and give her a son, Isaac

What we have anticipated for so long will finally come to fruition next week

- Chapter 21 records the birth of Isaac

Isn’t God’s grace amazing?

- At times, we can see how God actually prevented us from sinning
- Other times, He allows us to be confronted over our sin so that we can learn from it

We have seen both of those in this morning’s lesson

- An unbelieving king was protected by God from committing a very grave and serious sin
- A believing servant was confronted over his sin so that he would see the effects of sin

When we choose to be deceptive, there is a deadly price to be paid

- Our integrity and character will suffer
- Unbelievers will see hypocrisy in our lives
- God may very well bring discipline into our lives

This morning, we are going to celebrate the Lord’s Table

- God has designed this to be a time of heart examination
- I trust that you will take some time to consider this morning’s message and how you need to change in light of it

Let’s pray

Isn’t it sad that Abraham failed to learn from his mistake some 25-30 years earlier?

- He almost lost his wife in Egypt
- He came near to losing her again in Gerar

But if we look at our own hearts, we will see just how easy it is to commit the same sin, time and time again

- How many times in the past month have you had to ask forgiveness from the Lord for the same sin?

We can look back to Genesis 12 and see where Abraham went wrong

- Then we can flip over in our Bibles to chapter 20 and see that he made the same mistake again
- We shake our head, wondering how he could be so foolish

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 71.

The simple truth is that we are very much like Abraham

- Except everyone doesn't have an "open book" view into our hearts

What if your sins were published in a book?

- What if God were to view you as you have viewed Abraham?

I am grateful for the Lord's grace and long-suffering

- I am glad that He is in control

Beloved, look at your own spiritual condition this morning

- If you belong to Him, have you thanked Him for His grace in your life?
- Have you thanked Him that He sometimes – perhaps oftentimes – prevents us from sinning?

Consider another lesson from Genesis 20

- Have you thanked God that He made you aware of your sin?
- In so doing, it may be embarrassing, or frustrating, or humbling
- However, you will hopefully learn from it and be better because of it

I am glad that our hope is not found in Abraham

- He was deceitful at times
- He definitely was a sinner

Our hope and salvation is found in Christ

- He is the Deliverer that was promised in the OT
- He has come to rescue us from our sin

Of course, if you are here and have never trusted Christ, then realize that your greatest need is to turn to Him today

- Your sins have separated you from the holy God
- Unless your sins are taken away, you will spend eternity apart from Christ and His glory

Turn to Him today

- Confess your sinfulness
- Ask Him to forgive you of your sin
- Repent of your sinful lifestyle and ask Him to change you