

“...and God said...”

Following on from previous queries – we must yet again ask if we truly, as believers, understand and believe the nature of God. Not just *“Do you believe in God?”* but *“Do you truly believe He acts in our lives today?”*

God says in His word that He is an active God, Who intervenes in our very lives. Do you believe it?

In this chapter we find a God Who steps into lives and actually alters motives and minds, and so stops, changes, or initiates Christian (and sometimes unsaved) behaviour proactively. In our Arminian lives we tend to think of God as Someone far away, Whose actions in our lives are remote and even abstract. But, here we see God intervening in a remarkable way. We also see Him continuing to help Abraham though he had used deceit in an attempt to save his life.

Once again we may ask *“When are our words lies? And when are they admissible as a plausible strategem, allowable for a good purpose?”* It is not the first or only time that righteous men of God have used such strategies and, on each occasion, we do not read that God objected to, or punished, them. Is, then, our understanding of what constitutes a ‘lie’, in error, or deficient?

However, the main thrust of this chapter is the amazing fact of predestination! Modern men - including many Christians - hate the idea of predestination in all its glory. They do not mind God providing avenues of escape for us, or alternatives, but they loathe the notion that God can actually stop them doing something or that he leads them without their own knowledge to do or say certain things. This is because they secretly believe they have free-will, when, in reality, such a state does not exist.

The idea is so strong that many Christians refute the ongoing and real activities of God. That is why they replace God’s intervention in, say, someone’s health, with the lower status of medical doctors and science. It is why they ignore God’s active provision of a job or house or money, with much lower providers, such as employers, mortgage companies and banks! They cannot differentiate God from those He uses as delegated persons.

A doctor might well have been instrumental in our return to good health – but it was God Who

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

gave the doctor his skill and even the aim to return good health. It was not the doctor *per se*, for he was only an instrument used by God at that time. The same goes for all other incidents and circumstances in life... all good comes from God, often via other people or events. They do not come to us via good fortune, but via Almighty God! Do not deny God His dues, and do not ascribe to humanity, or to nature, what properly belongs to God. Recognise God in all things, and your life will be transformed! Do not – and your life will be shapeless and aimless, lacking in genuine faith.

Verses 1&2

1.

“And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

2.

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

After the cataclysm brought upon the cities of the plains, Abraham moved his family and goods north-west to the Negeb – southern Judah – and the opposite way from the now dead area once occupied by the wicked peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah. He stopped at Gerar, between Kadesh and Shur.

Gerar (‘a lodging place’) was sited south-east of Gaza, and was a Philistine town, now known as Umm. Kadesh (‘holy’), also known as Kadesh-Barnea, was sited in the uttermost south of Judah. Shur (‘wall’: ‘wilderness of Etham’) was on the border of Egypt near the Red Sea. Thus, as you look at a map, Abraham moved to an area on the curved coastline that finally touches on the northern mouth of the Nile.

Once again, Abraham passed on the story to the locals that Sarah was his sister! Thus it was that Abimelech, king of the city, sent servants for Sarah with the intention of making her his own. Abimelech (‘Melek is my father’ or ‘father is king’) was possibly also a title, used to denote all Philistine kings.

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

It seems that Abraham was extremely wary of everyone, and in the light of the turbulent history of the area, perhaps he was right to be cautious. However, it is strange that he continued in this story, especially as she was about 100 years old at the time. Could it be that, at that time in the world's existence, men and women did not suffer the ravages of age so much – after all, Sarah was 'middle aged' compared with modern people – and so was still very much a beauty? We cannot tell, but she must have been very attractive for the king to want her.

Verses 3-7

1.

"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.

2.

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

3.

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.

4.

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.

5.

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."

It is evident from the narrative that Sarah was given a room of her own, so the king had not yet taken her as his wife. God (*elohiyim* in this text) visited Abimelech at night, using a dream to communicate with him. In the text this was a *chalowm*, which can have one of two meanings – either that of an 'ordinary' dream known to all men, or to

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

a prophetic dream given by God. Thus, the word is a more restricted use of the root, *chalam*, which has several more meanings. We know that the dream was prophetic, because, simply, the text says so.

A dream from God is 'real' and has more force than an ordinary dream, and in this dream Abimelech was told by God that he was a 'dead man'. That is, he was to suffer *muwth* – death by execution (of God) as a penalty. The reason was that he had taken another man's wife to be his own. In this text we have one of the more extraordinary examples of predestination, where God intervenes in a man's thought processes, stopping him from thinking and enacting those thoughts. It is yet another proof that God acts and we just follow... there is no 'free-will', only an ability to move within defined boundaries as God allows, guides, or commands.

In his dream, Abimelech spoke to God, and because of the divine nature of such dreams, his discussion was as real as any taking place between two human beings. Abimelech had not 'come near her', *qarab* – approached Sarah in any personal way.

He pleaded with God (this time referred to as *Adonay*): "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" At first sight this seems to be an odd question, as God was speaking to him as an individual. What this question tells us is that Abimelech knew about the fate of the cities of the plain and was afraid. We also see in this question, that Abimelech feared that the whole city would suffer the same fate because of a supposed sin of the king. He pleaded that the whole city is *tsaddiyq* – righteous, just and lawful. 'Surely you will not treat us as you did Sodom?' That this is the meaning, is suggested in verse 7.

Abimelech continued 'Did not Abraham tell me that Sarah was his sister? And did she not say to me that he was her brother? My integrity and actions are innocent!' That is, he was saying that he did not commit any sin for he had not touched the woman. The implication is that if he was free of guilt then he was also free of the punishment.

(Note: The text proves that we need not be aware that we are sinning, or that non-cognisance makes us free of guilt. What makes us guilty is not our cognition, but that 'God said'. By this 'law' we are guilty whether or not we sin knowingly. This is one reason we must read scripture and apply it, for there is no other way we can normally know what God demands).

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

We then have a remarkable statement by God. He told Abimelech that He knew the king was innocent... for it was *He, God, Who had stopped, chasak*, him from sinning! Let us be very clear about this; God had actually intervened and restrained Abimelech from both thinking and doing an act that would have brought about punishment for sin. This word, *chasak*, also includes the idea of being spared.

(Note: There are times when we sin and yet do not observe God's anger in our lives. However, observing His anger is not necessarily the absolute proof of His anger. His anger can show itself in removal of His presence, or lack of help in our lives. It could, too, be delayed for His own reasons. God WILL act against us if we sin and do not repent and change).

Thus, God spared the man by stopping his thoughts and actions in the matter. So, if you think that you do not sin in certain circumstances because of your own willpower, then think again! It is God Who, in His mercy, spares you from entering into sin by intervening in your thoughts, preventing sinful actions. Time and again we find this total sense of predestination. Many scholars wrongly think that God's interventions are only partial, and that man can come to a rational decision based on his free-will. This is Arminian error. What operates is *chasak*: the principle of active restraint being placed upon a person's thoughts and actions.

This is itself based on the principle of *nathan*, God's sufferance, meaning to permit, or grant; to assign or designate; to be 'put upon'. It was, then, God's will (not the will of a man/the king) that Abimelech should not sin.

When God finished talking to Abimelech, He told him to return Sarah to her husband, "for he is a prophet". 'Return her to him and you shall live, keep her and you (and your people) shall die'. The choice was stark and final, but Abimelech was already sure as to what to do! If he sent Sarah back, then Abraham would 'pray' for him – *palal*, mediate with God, intercede.

God, then, actively stopped Abimelech from sinning. Once that had occurred, He then gave him a choice – to sin or not – in the matter of returning Sarah to her husband. A number of issues arise in this text. For example, the taking of someone else's wife or husband, which is a sin punishable by death; that sin and thoughts of it can be actively stopped by God; that one's acknowledgement that something is sin is not necessary to incur punishment... we are

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

punished because sin is sin, whether we know we have sinned or not, and whether we accept it as sin, or not.

For a righteous man, to sin is to move outside the boundary set by God. *Not* to sin is to choose within that boundary, and to retain the safety and favour of God.

Verses 8-13

1.

“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.

2.

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.

3.

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?

4.

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.

5.

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.

6.

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 shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.”

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

When he awoke the next morning, the king related his frightening account to his courtiers. To a man, they were all “sore afraid”. The God Who had just destroyed a whole region was now about to destroy them also, if Abimelech did not comply! They were exceeding afraid, and the meaning includes the idea of reverence and respect for the God Who could inflict such terrifying power, coupled with their awe of His majesty. How many modern Christians live with this awe and fear of God’s judgement? Very few, for how many truly believe God acts today? How many see in huge catastrophes the hand of God? *(2014 note: very pertinent, given the ‘natural’ catastrophes that occurred in the UK).*

Abimelech called for Abraham and demanded to know why he had brought this awful thing upon an innocent city. ‘What have I done to you, to deserve this evil? You should not have done this terrible thing to us!’

Verse 11 might seem strange, but Abimelech wondered if Abraham had received a prophecy concerning the king and his kingdom (“what sawest thou”), and so had acted in the way he did. The answer was, however, personal and not of prophecy. Abraham told the king that he thought the city might have been sinful, and its people might have killed him for the sake of obtaining his wife.

Far-fetched? Maybe not. We were not privy to all of Abraham’s life, nor do we fully understand the raw and even savage culture of that time. His fear might well have been justified, especially as Sodom and the other cities were destroyed for just such evils as Abraham feared. It is easy and ultra-pious to say that we would not have acted in this way, when we are safe in our own modern lands. We should, then, hold back our personal judgement, when God did not Himself judge Abraham. We, too, are more than capable of repeating certain sins, just as Abraham did. In his case he was what we call ‘economic with the truth’, because what he said was true, but devious. We have all done this at some time, when we were in fear.

Abraham then pointed out that he had not in fact lied, but had only used a strategy: ‘Sarah is indeed my sister – her father was my father, but her mother was not my mother.’ In other words, Sarah was his step-sister, whom he had married. He continued in his story, that he had asked Sarah, who was very beautiful, to collude with him, for when they travelled many might desire her and kill him to get her. ‘Do this as a kindness to me’ he asked, ‘and wherever we travel call me your brother.’ He probably hoped that this would stave off unwanted attention, but Sarah’s

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

beauty was like a magnet to those in power, every time.

Verses 14-16

1.

“And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

2.

And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

3.

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.”

Abimelech must have understood Abraham’s dilemma, given his later actions. He gave Abraham silver, sheep, oxen and servants, and returned Sarah to him. ‘Live wherever you wish in my land’. He then rebuked Sarah for her part in Abraham’s deception: ‘Look, I have given your brother (using a word meaning ‘half-brother’*) a thousand pieces of silver; he conceals the truth from all who wish to be with you.’ “Thus she was reproved.” (**The word used is ‘ach. It has several meanings, but in this text it can only mean half-brother, with the same father. It cannot mean same mother).*

It is a fact, that Christians often conceal the truth from others. In particular, they conceal their own sin from others, making them think they are righteous and always pure. They also hide truth from other Christians, by saying they love the brethren, when, in fact, they despise or oppose some without just cause. We may not, therefore, condemn Abraham or Sarah for their ‘game’, but should beware of our own subtle wanderings into sin. (It is not always wrong to conceal something).

Verses 17&18

1.

Genesis 20

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 31 March 2015 20:27

“So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

2.

For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.”

From this text it seems possible that Sarah lived in the house of Abimelech for some time, otherwise how would they have known their young women were barren (a penalty given by God, Jehovah)? Even so, God (*elohiyim*) told Abimelech that if he obeyed God and returned Sarah, then Abraham would pray for him and his people. Abraham now prayed to God, to lift the curse of barrenness from the women, and so they all became pregnant.

Again, we find that it was *God* – not ‘nature’, or ‘circumstances’, or ‘health reasons’ or any other human reason – Who caused the women not to bear children. He had “fast closed up all the wombs”, *atsar*, refrained or restrained, halted, stopped!

God acts as He wishes and His hand is often on our several disasters in life, as the result of our sins and waywardness. Even today we should look intelligently at life and at what befalls us, so that we may live in true fear of the Lord, a fear that will bring joy, peace and love, for the same holy hand also brings us gifts and benefits, as given by a mighty king to his royal children.

© July 2005 (Revised March 2014)

---oOo---

{loadposition btm_address}