

Standing on the heights overlooking the valley, Abraham had probably watched the terrible destruction God wrought upon Sodom and its neighbors. Did he fear for Lot and his family? How long was it before he learned what had happened to Lot—and of the ensuing immoral incidents in Zoar? Were there refugees from the valley converging on Abraham's camp?

Next we read Abraham packed up and left Mamre where he had camped for some time. He was still a pilgrim and an alien. In chapter 26 we learn it was a famine which led Abraham to move on. He traveled westerly and a little southerly, but did not take the Way to Shur toward Egypt as he had years before in a famine. Nor did he go the way Hagar had taken when she fled years before. But he went to the city of Gerar, the city of Abimelech, King of the Philistines. At that time it apparently was only a modest sized city but it was located in the midst of a fertile strip between two deserts across the southern part of Palestine, so it served as a refuge for Abraham and Isaac in times of famine. Eventually (about 500 years later) that land was assigned to Judah by Moses.

The Philistines were not strictly Canaanites. They were descendants of Ham, but through a different son, Mizraim who had established Egypt. The Philistines had migrated from Caphtor (Amos 9:7), a location in northeastern Egypt. They settled first on the southwestern coast lands along the Mediterranean. The land of Palestine is apparently named after them. Are the Palestinians of today descendants of these early Philistines? They certainly occupy the same territory and exhibit the same antagonism toward Israel. When Israel entered the land under Joshua God mercifully led them the long way around to avoid the strong resistance they would have encountered on the "way of the Philistines." They had had no battle experience having been slaves in Egypt for decades.

So the Philistines occupied land which was to be possessed by the Israelites after they entered Canaan. When not successfully dispossessed by Israel they became troublesome neighbors for centuries. Their successors still are. They made numerous incursions into the land when God allowed them to be his means of disciplining His people when they worshiped other gods. They took the productive land for themselves and impoverished the Israelites. They even took captive the Ark of God in the days of Eli. Among those who were used by God to resist them were Shamgar with his ox goad, Sampson, King Saul, young David (Goliath), and later as king, Solomon and others.

The Philistines seem to have some symbolic meaning in scripture for us today. The nation of Israel represents

God's people today and their various antagonists represent antagonists of the believer today. For instance Egypt, outside of Israel, represents the world and all of its attractions that tempt the believer to stray from devotion to and dependence on Christ. The Philistines, occupying a place within the land, represent a particular segment of the world, the religious world. It has taken up occupancy within Christendom as various sects, denominations and heresies. The Edomites, naturally related to Israel, represent the natural man (Adam and Edom are essentially the same name) whose wisdom and reasoning easily displaces the wisdom and faith of the spiritual, born-again man and works its way into an Assembly's thinking and ways and decisions. Other neighbors of Israel have characteristics with similar spiritual applications to us today.

Back to Abraham and Sarah whom having moved again due to a famine find themselves in a "been there before" situation. We learn that a fear was still deeply rooted in their hearts since they left Haran twenty-some years before.

*12 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. 13 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.*

Peter comments on that fear on Sarah's part.

*1Peter 3:6 (DBY) as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose children ye have become, doing good, and not fearing with any kind of consternation.*

Was her dependance upon her husband, and her love for him so great, that her fears that he would be killed led her to sacrifice herself for him? Or was her faith in God and His promises so great that she allowed this to happen to her without undue fear? And did Abraham love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her?

*Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

What kind of emotional scar did this incident leave on her heart?

Human reasoning would say "what use for Abraham to lay down his life to protect Sarah." But there was more at stake here. Much more. The fate of the human race lay in the son that God had promised them both. Sarah was to conceive within the year. Yet there she was, in the harem of a pagan king. Abraham should not have gotten them into this situations in the first place. But having gotten himself there, the power and faithfulness of the Almighty God to His promise was in question. And He intervened! He acted personally and supernaturally to protect the fearful subjects of His promises. His promises will always be fulfilled despite our lack of faith and obedience. The way may be more difficult, but it will not

be without Him. Peter again remarks upon this.

*1Peter 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved (through difficultly be preserved), where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

God came to the heathen King in a dream that shook him to his roots. He was as good as dead for he had taken a woman from her husband. Did marriage actually mean something to these pagans? He protested his righteousness and God acknowledged it but informed him it was His own providential intervention that had really kept him from her. (She must have been an attractive woman, though ninety years of age, for this to have happened at all. Or rather was this a case of him consolidating an alliance through a marriage of a daughter or sister?) God acknowledged that Abimelech had done this in the integrity of his heart. All He required was that he return her to Abraham. He also informed the king that Abraham was a prophet and that he would pray for him. So he did need forgiveness from God. Abimelech promptly submitted to God's requirement. He was so impressed and grateful to the One Who had supernaturally confronted him and spared him, his household and his kingdom from destruction he went further than required. He used every means at his disposal to prove his good intentions and to ward off the judgment of God even though God had declared him innocent of an intentional sin. One lesson here is that if we harm someone, even if it is unintentional, we are responsible to attempt to make it right and to also impart some blessing to the one(s) we've damaged or inconvenienced. The law of the Trespass Offering required restitution plus adding a fifth part. Should we who are under grace voluntarily do less, in love?

Abimelech also rightly confronted Abraham about his deception and the danger it had put him in before God. Here we have a case of an unbeliever confronting a believer for a sin. Has that ever happened to you? It has to me. How embarrassing! How humbling. (I take some

encouragement that my Christian testimony in that secular surroundings [at work] was such that he could detect an inconsistency in my life. I didn't know him as a believer and never found out if he was. But I am thankful God used him to speak to me. I stopped what I had been doing.)

Abraham was given the opportunity and privilege to pray for a pagan king who had trespassed against him and to intercede for him before God. See Job 42:8,9 for a somewhat similar incident. We are given that privilege and responsibility in our daily lives as well.

*1Timothy 2 1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; {exhort: or, desire} 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. {authority: or, eminent place} 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

Abraham did pray for him, demonstrating a repentant attitude on his part for the deception he had worked.

Abimelech showered Abraham with gifts, livestock and servants. Why did he accept them? And why did God seemingly reward Abraham's unfaithfulness and deception and lack of faith? By allowing this He reaffirmed Abraham's dignified position as a man of God's own choosing and destiny. This Abraham was The Possessor of the Promises for the ultimate blessing of the earth. Despite his failure, he would soon act in faith to produce the promised son.

Did Abimelech become a man of faith at this point? Clearly God was working on his heart. Abraham's sin was an occasion for God revealing Himself to Abimelech. Did he respond? We meet him again soon. Let's see if we can tell. In the long run, we know that despite this direct confrontation by God, and other multiple early contacts with men of God, the Philistines as a nation did not submit to God but opposed and harassed His people for centuries.

Have you heeded God's call?

By Ronald Canner, July 14, 2010