

## Abraham and Abimelech I



The particular Conflict under consideration appears to be a repeat of Abram's encounter with Pharaoh king of Egypt regarding Sarai. The event under consideration involved Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech king of Gerar: "And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the land of the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur. And he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, because of the woman whom thou hast taken. For she is a man's wife. Now Abimelech had not come near her. And he said, Lord, wilt thou slay even a righteous nation? Said he not himself unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother. In the integrity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in the dream, Yea, I know that in the integrity of thy heart thou has done this, and I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man's 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." (Genesis 20:1–7).

There is a great deal about this Conflict, and its subsequent Resolution that are simply unknown: the events that led up to Abraham's initial meeting with Abimelech, and the subsequent time and circumstance of Abimelech sending for Sarah. There is an indication, from verse 18 of our reading, that some time had passed to facilitate the events described, saying, "For Jehovah had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife." That being said, the consideration of the Conflict and the subsequent Resolution will deal with the stated facts, and the moral instructions to be learned.

The facts: Abraham and Sarah had conspired to tell Abimelech that Sarah was the sister of Abraham, upon which Abimelech took Sarah into his house. Following this event God came to Abimelech in a dream, and said, "Behold, thou art but a dead man, because of the woman whom thou hast taken. For she is a man's wife. Now Abimelech had not come near her."

The marriage relationship is as old as Adam and Eve: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The phrase, "shall be one flesh," authorizes, by God's decree, the man and a woman to lawfully cohabit, copulate, and bring forth children. Thus, the doing of such with the wife of another man constituted sinning against God, and His right to set the boundaries of cohabiting, copulating, and bringing forth children, and in the case with Abimelech, was death. It is evident from the events of Abram's dealings with Pharaoh, and Abimelech, the taking of another man's wife was well recognized as a transgression: which is also substantiated by Job, who was likely a contemporary with Abram, saying, "If my heart hath been enticed unto a woman, And I have laid wait at my neighbor's door; Then let my wife grind unto another, And let others bow down upon her. For that were a heinous crime; Yea, it were an iniquity to be punished by the judges: For it is a fire that consumeth unto Destruction, And would root out all mine increase." (Job 31:9-12).

Abimelech makes his appeal of innocence to God, saying “Lord, wilt thou slay even a righteous nation? Said he not himself unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother. In the integrity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in the dream, Yea, I know that in the integrity of thy heart thou has done this, and I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man's 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.” Resolution 1: restore the man’s wife.

One of the moral lessons that can be learned from this event is that, the violation of God’s laws are still violations of law, i.e., sin, whether the offender knows it, or not, i.e., ignorance does not make an unlawful deed, lawful. Thus, whether a woman is cohabiting with a man, or a man with a woman, married to other, and without the knowledge of either, does not make the cohabiting lawful, but rather one described, in the text, as “sinning against me,” i.e. God. King David affirmed this, in the fifty first Psalm, which says, “A Psalm of David; when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba, saying, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight; that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psalm 51:1–4).

In today’s society an individual would say, “that’s not fair!” I didn’t know, no one told me, I’m innocent! However, this line of reasoning is invalid, even in the secular realm of society: man’s accountability to the law is not based upon ignorance, but upon the law. When an individual goes before a court of law, as a result of a violation, his guiltiness is not based upon ignorance, or even the man’s integrity. Now, the courts may be lenient, if the offender had followed

due course, and had believed, “In the integrity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this.” But nevertheless, the law prescribes the consequences associated with the violation of the law, and for the judge to be “justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest,” the judge is also bound by law to be law abiding.

This principle is seen in God’s dealing with mankind. In the beginning, God told Adam, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17). The law, and its subsequent punishment for the violation thereof, had been set. In order for God to be just, it required that the sentence be carried out as dictated, and, as the apostle Paul aptly stated, “Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Romans 5:12), thus, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). As “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34), laws, and the subsequent violation thereof, in order for God to remain just, requires that God judges ALL men by the same standard. For God to remain just, He could not just give salvation to mankind apart from the consequences prescribed by law. For God to be as He ought to be, i.e., just, God displayed his justice and mercy by requiring a sacrifice and that’s where Christ comes in: “But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:21–26).