

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Deja Vu”

Genesis 20:1-18

2002

Introduction

Déjà vu = French term meaning, “Already seen”, or in our terms, “been there, done that!”

It’s that strange sense that you’ve said something before or been somewhere before.

Unfortunately, I’ve never had a significant déjà vu experience. They are always meaningless and trivial. In fact, as I thought about this message, I couldn’t recall the details of even one of these experiences in spite of the fact that I’ve had dozens over the years.

In Chapter 20 of Genesis, Abraham was about to have a déjà vu experience of his own.

Unfortunately, for Abraham, his “been there, done that” experience was a reality, because Chapter 20 is a virtual rerun of Abraham’s sin found in Genesis 12:10-20

I The Recycled Lie

A. Abraham and Sarah **moved** to Gerar [Verse 1]

Gerar was the capital city of the Philistines. It was a seacoast country on the southwest side of Palestine, just above the Gulf of Suez on the way to Egypt.

There are at least three possible reasons for Abraham’s relocation:

1. He wanted to move away from the painful memories of God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and on the gruesome death of Lot’s extended family.
2. His life was in danger from the surviving villagers in Zoar.
3. The land was rendered unproductive for his herds as a result of the burning sulfur that God had poured out on the cities and the plains.

Despite the logic of Abraham’s move, we have no indication that God led this decision.

Application:

When I’ve make decisions apart from the will of God I have invariably suffered for it. Prov 16:25 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

B. Abraham **lied** about his relationship to Sarah [Verse 2a]

1. He told people that Sarah was his sister

The information Abraham gave was totally factual. Sarah was his half-sister. But it wasn’t the whole truth. Abram’s intent was clearly to deceive. He was trusting in his deception to protect him instead of trusting in the Lord. It is the same lie he told Pharaoh of Egypt thirty years earlier in Gen 12:13.

Lev 19:11 “Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

The problem with lying:

1. It makes it easier to do the next time
He has already pulled the same stunt with Pharaoh of Egypt in Gen 12:20.
2. It affects and influences others around us
In Genesis 26:7, we'll discover Abraham's son, Isaac, pulling this exact same stunt with his wife Rebekah and Abimelech's grandson.
3. It brings a reproach to the name of God
Abraham's lie and subsequent exposure is an embarrassment to the name of God.

Application:

If you are going to claim to be a Christian, please don't dishonor that name by being a habitual liar, a cheat, a drunkard, a fornicator, or a hypocrite.
You may be the only Bible your friends and family ever read.

II The Recycled Danger

- A. Abimelech sent for Sarah and took her [Verse 2b]
This is a virtually identical story line as Gen 12:15 when Pharaoh took Sarah.
Behind the staging of human history, is Satan himself, attempting through Abraham's unbelief and fear to foil God's plan for a promised deliverer – Jesus Christ!
- B. God warns Abimelech in a dream [Verse 3]
 1. "You are as good as dead -- she is a married woman"

Application:

In case you didn't know, God places a very high premium on marital fidelity.

Heb 13:4 "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

Prov 6:27-29 "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished."

- C. Abimelech's objection: [Verse 4]
 1. "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?"
Innocent = Tsaddiyq = "Righteous"
Interestingly, this is the very question Abraham asked God regarding the people of Sodom in Gen 18:23: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"
 - a. Abraham and Sarah both lied to me

Illustration: Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:9 “Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

Some have suggested that Sarah was not responsible since she was being submissive to Abraham. But as we discussed several weeks ago, submission has its limits – we must always obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). In the biblical chain-of-command, God’s revealed will is supreme, and it overrules all other levels of authority if they are in direct conflict with God’s Word.

2. “I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands”
But scripture tells us that ignorance and good intentions are not enough!

Lev 4:1-2 “Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands ... he is guilty.'” When he is made aware of the sin he committed he must bring a sacrifice.”

Illustration: Grandma and her insistence that she hadn’t sinned for over 15 years.

D. God’s favor extended [Verse 6]

1. “I know you did this with a clear conscience”
2. “I **kept** you from sinning against me”
Kept = Chasak = “To restrain, hinder, hold back”

Jude 1:24 “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy ...”

Ps 119:9-11 “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word ... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

- a. “I did not let you touch her”
Had it not been for the influence of God, this man would have plunged right on into sin. For Abraham's sake, God restrained him.

3. “Return Abraham’s wife” [Verse 7a]

- a. “For he is a **prophet**”

In what sense was Abraham a prophet of God?

1. He was a spokesman for God - Gen 12:2-3
2. He was an intercessor for God - Gen 18:16-33
3. He was privileged by God to know future events - Gen 15:4-5; 17:1-8
Gen 18:17-18 “Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

Application:

Though we may sin on occasion, like Abraham, we remain loved by God, called by God, and commissioned by God to be His servants and ambassadors.

b. “He will pray for you and you will live”

This must have left Abimelech shaking his head. How could Abraham be a liar and at the same time a man of God to whom Abimelech must go to receive healing and salvation?

James 5:14-16 “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

E. God’s severe warning [Verse 7b]

1. “If you do not return her you and all yours will die”

Essentially, the message is, “Repent or die!”

Application:

Ezek 18:30-32 “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”

III The Recycled Rebuke

A. Abimelech summoned all his officials the next morning [Verse 8]

1. He told them everything and they were very much afraid

Afraid = Yare' = “To be in dread”

Abimelech wasted no time making matters right before God. He arose early in the morning and reported his dream to the leaders of Gerar.

B. Abimelech confronted Abraham: [Verse 9-10]

It must have been a humiliating experience for Abraham – this man of faith, this great patriarch of the saints, this friend of God, to be confronted over his ungodly deception.

1. “What have you done to us?”

2. “How have we wronged you that you have brought:

a. Such great guilt upon me and my kingdom

Gen 26:10 “Abimelech: "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.”

3. “You have done things to me that should not be done!”
4. “What was your **reason** for doing this?”

Abraham had not only done what was wrong in the eyes of God, but even in the eyes of pagans. Abraham, who was to be a source of blessing (12:2,3), had instead become a source of stumbling and suffering for the people of Gerar.

Luke 17:1-3 “Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.”

At this point, Abraham should have been in a state of full-scale repentance. But there is no indication that Abraham acknowledged or repented of his sin.

IV The Recycled Excuse

A. Abraham **justified** his deception [Verse 11-]

1. He assumes a lack of fear of God in Gerar

Abraham excuses his sinful deception by saying there was no fear of God in Gerar. But the real problem was that the fear of God wasn't in Abraham!

Prov 29:25 “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”

- a. They will kill me because of my wife

Gen 12:12 “When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live.”

2. He justifies his lie about Sarah [Verse 12]

- a. She really is my sister

He tried to defend himself by technicalities but not by truthfulness. But a half-truth, said with intent to deceive, is always a whole lie.

Prov 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

3. He blames God for his vulnerable condition [Verse 13a]

“God made me wander from my father's household!”

Prov 19:3 “A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.”

B. Abraham **pressured** Sarah into his deception: [Verse 13b]

1. “If you really love me, say I am your brother”

Love = Checed = “Kindness, favor, mercy, faithfulness”

Application:

Ladies, this is one of the oldest lines in the book – literally!

1. If you love me, you’ll sleep with me!
2. If you love me, you’ll lie to the IRS when the auditor comes!
3. If you love me, you’ll understand my need to play the field!
4. If you love me, you’ll tell the boss I’m sick.
5. If you love me, you’ll put me ahead of God!

V The Recycled Restoration

A. Abimelech gave sheep, cattle and slaves to Abraham [Verse 14a]

In showing generosity to Abraham, Abimelech was heaping burning coals on Abraham’s head (Romans 12:20). Abraham should have been giving gifts to Abimelech, because he was in the wrong. Instead, it was Abimelech who was generous!

Gen 12:16 “He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.”

B. Abimelech returned Sarah to Abraham [Verse 14b]

Ezek 33:14-16 “And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right -- if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.”

C. Abimelech opened his land to Abraham [Verse 15]

1. Live wherever you like

Gen 13:8-9 “Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.”

D. Abimelech affirmed Sarah’s purity [Verse 16]

1. He gave Abraham 1,000 shekels of silver

- a. To cover the offense against you

Kidner summarizes this passage by saying: “In offering the compensation

Abimelech owned his error (though the term ‘thy brother’ re-emphasized his innocence), and in accepting it Abraham acknowledged the matter settled.”

2. He completely vindicated Sarah

Vindicated = *Yakach* = “To set right”

- a. Sarah was "set right" by Abimelech’s rebuke.
- b. Sarah was "set right" in her moral purity in the community.

VI The Recycled Mediation

A. Abraham **prayed** to God for Abimelech [Verse 17]

What a humbling experience it must have been for Abraham to intercede on behalf of Abimelech. A deep sense of unworthiness must have come over him. It was surely not his righteousness which was the basis for divine healing. Any time that we are used of God, it is solely because of the grace of God.

Matt 5:44-45 “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”

B. God **healed** Abimelech, his wife and slave girls [Verse 18]

1. So that they could have children again
2. For the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech’s household because of Abraham’s wife Sarah

Conclusion

Déjà vu! As long as we live in the flesh, we will continue to have moments where life seems to be repeating itself.

But the day is drawing near, when the days of “Been there, done that” will be over forever!

Rev 21:1-5 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

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