

99-03-21b

Let's resume our study now in Genesis chapter 20. We will complete our study of this chapter this morning. And we left off asking ourselves the question, if Abraham, in just everyday terms, if Abraham is such a whiz-bang believer, how come God doesn't come to him when he makes a mistake? And what does that say for us? If we're making progress down the road and we start to mess up in some way, is God not going to let us know? He seems to speak to Abraham on some occasions and to go out of his way to speak to somebody else on other occasions.

What does that say about God's communication to us? Well, as we've already alluded this morning to the connections that this section of Genesis has to earlier sections, both to Genesis 18 and 19, the sections we've just studied, and back to Genesis 12, we've seen that there are many contrasts with chapter 12 because, unlike chapter 12, where famine drives Abraham to Egypt, there's no famine here. There's no compelling circumstance that seems to be driving Abraham out of the land. The conversation with Sarah isn't recorded.

He will go on later to tell Abimelech that this is just our common practice, that everywhere we go, we always do this. Verse 13, the gods, it appears to be the way Abraham phrases this, caused me to wander from my father's house. I said to her, This is your kindness that you should do for me in every place, wherever we go.

Say of me, He is my brother. Apparently, this is everywhere they go outside the land of promise, because they don't do this with their neighbors in the land. We have no record of that.

So this is apparently whenever they sojourn outside the land of promise. This, of course, is the second occasion, so this would be twice now. But there's no conversation recorded with Sarah.

There's no indication of Sarah's beauty being the ostensible cause of the need for this. There's no expression of fear on Abraham's part that he's afraid for his life initially when they perpetrate this lie. This comes afterward in his conversation with Abimelech when he does say in verse 11 that they will kill me on account of my wife.

But also in chapter 12, once again, Abraham messes up. God has revealed Himself to Abraham. He goes down to Egypt.

He commits this lie. Sarah is taken into the harem. And God doesn't go to Abraham.

He goes to Pharaoh. Well, what happens in that case? The experience of Abimelech and the experience of Pharaoh is different. Pharaoh doesn't get a direct revelation from God, does he? He figures out what's going on because he gets hit with plagues.

Poor tent of things to come. There will be a later Pharaoh who's going to get hit with plagues to convince him of the need to do right by God's people. But this Pharaoh gets hit with a plague.

And he figures out. He probably goes to his diviners and wise men or something. But he brings Sarah into the harem.

He gets hit with plagues. He says, this is cause and effect. And he calls in Abraham and says, what's up? Here, Abimelech gets direct revelation from God in a dream.

He has a conversation with God. And God speaks directly to him. This didn't happen with Pharaoh.

Egypt throughout the Bible represents the unregenerate source or the unregenerate beginning from which believers are delivered under the blood. Pharaoh, the king of the unbelieving land of Egypt, doesn't get a direct revelation from God. So it is already significant to answer one of our questions.

Is Abimelech a believer? He is certainly distinguished from Pharaoh in that he does get direct revelation from God. So that's a contrast. Pharaoh, when he confronts Abraham, or Abram in that case, he is angry at the deception.

He had already given Abram goods as sort of a bride price for his sister. And he's sort of been defrauded out of these goods. He wouldn't have given these things to Abram except that he thought he was in effect purchasing a girl for his harem.

Purchasing a woman to join his group there. He doesn't make a willing gift of these things. He's defrauded out of it.

He doesn't take it back, but he's pretty angry and he expels Abraham from his kingdom. He says, get out of Egypt. Keep the stuff I gave you, but get out.

Abimelech, on the other hand, has made apparently no gifts to Abraham at this point. They're not mentioned if he gave any when he took Sarah into his harem. After he finds out the truth that's revealed to him in the dream, and after he confronts Abraham in verse 14, then Abimelech, after the conversation, after the truth is uncovered through the revelation and through the conversation with Abraham, Abimelech voluntarily takes sheep, oxen, male and female servants and gives them to Abraham and restores Sarah to him as well.

Pharaoh expelled Abraham from Egypt. Abimelech tells Abraham, My land is before you. Dwell wherever it pleases you.

In verse 15. All of these things signify to us that there is a big difference personally between Pharaoh and Abimelech. They are two different kinds of men and I would

venture to suggest they are two different categories of men.

There's another very profound and perhaps the most important difference between the two in these two stories is Pharaoh, as a result of the plague, investigates and figures out what's going on and expels Abraham. Abimelech, in his communication from God, he answers. God comes to him in verse 3 and says, Indeed, you are a dead man.

This is literally, this is a participle of the verb muth in Hebrew. M-U-T or M-U-T-H. It's kind of a small H. That's the verb for die in Hebrew.

To die. And this is a participle. You know a participle, we sometimes look at it like a gerund or something in English.

It's got an I-N-G on the end. And a lot of times, participles are used as a noun. So, you are a dying one is literally what God is saying.

You are a man in the process of dying. You are about to die. You are dying even as we speak, is the idea.

Your death is already in progress. You are dying. Or you are a dying one.

Because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife. Now, anytime somebody takes another man's wife, anytime adultery gets committed, does God come to them and say, you're a dying one. You're about to die because you've taken another man's wife.

Obviously not. Adultery has been rampant throughout history. It's this particular case with this particular king and this particular woman that brings God into the equation.

There have been millions of adulteries committed down through history. And there have already been probably thousands or hundreds of thousands of adulteries committed in human history up to this point. God didn't intervene in each one and appear to someone in a dream and say you've got to stop this adultery or I'm going to finish you off.

But it's because of the parties involved. It's because of God's covenant promises to Abraham and by extension to the entire human race that are going to be fulfilled through Abraham that it is essential that Sarah not be compromised. So God intervenes.

And it's also because of the king involved. And God comes to this king and speaks to him. Now, how many of us here believe in Santa Claus? As a literal guy who lives at a literal North Pole with a literal band of elves and eight tiny reindeer and so forth.

Obviously there is a concept of Santa Claus. There is a story of Santa Claus. There are dime store guys that dress up like him.

But as far as an actual guy with an actual Mrs. Claus and elves and so forth, none of us

do. Now, when you go home tonight and you lay your head on your pillow and you go unconscious and fall asleep and begin to dream, if Santa Claus appears to you and starts telling you things about your life and your circumstances and what you ought to do or what's about to happen to you and you wake up tomorrow morning and you say, Oh, I had a dream that Santa Claus came and told me I need to make an investment in AT&T stock because the stock market is going to rise or some other thing. Because you don't believe in Santa Claus, you're going to be really skeptical about the content of that dream, right? Because you are an unbeliever in Santa Claus.

Abimelech, there is no question in his mind here, is there? He doesn't doubt the veracity of the message. He doesn't doubt the validity of the dream. When he wakes up the next morning, he doesn't say, Call the chief steward.

Find out what was in that food I ate last night. I had the wildest dream. There's no question in his mind.

He is totally convinced. Not only that, but when God speaks to him and says, You are a dead man. You are a dying man, literally.

Because of the woman whom you have taken. For she is a man's wife. The explanation that this constitutes adultery, Abimelech understands this.

He knows that this is a wrong. He says, Lord, will you slay a righteous nation also? And the reason for this, as we study this section and glean all the details, these people have also already come under a plague. All of the wombs have been closed in Abimelech's household.

When you get all the way down to verse 17, Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his female servants. Then they bore children for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. We have to think about this a little bit.

Because if our understanding is correct that there is about a year from the time that God appears to Abraham on the hillside and confirms the promise about this time next year, Sarah will have a son. And now he is going to journey to Gerar to Abimelech's kingdom. This is going to take a few weeks after the destruction of Sodom.

He gets there. Sarah is taken into the harem. Here is another couple of weeks going by.

How do you know that all the wombs in your household have been closed? This is sort of a nine-month process where you make attempts at conception and you keep looking and looking and nobody is getting pregnant. Well, it takes a month or two to even find this out. You can say, well, somebody had a bad month.

Let's try again next month or whatever. But to confirm that everybody is having trouble

conceiving, this would be stretched over a period of months, wouldn't it? And you wouldn't really know this. It would be like six or eight months.

Well, now you've got a problem in chronology in the biblical account. Because how do you know? And it says now they began to bear, to conceive. Well, how do you know that? That's going to take another month or two to figure out.

Well, now everybody is conceiving again. But how long does it take before you realize that nobody is conceiving? If that's the measure. This is going to be measured in months.

And if you allow enough time for this, you don't have enough time. Abimelech is not going to be taking a pregnant Sarah into his harem, is he? So if you get to the end of this process and Sarah is, quote unquote, not showing, not apparently pregnant or whatever, now you've got a chronological thing. Because a year from when God appears to Abraham on the mountain, Sarah will have a son.

She's got to go through a nine-month pregnancy. And so you wind up with a time problem here. There are two possibilities here.

One, as I pointed out when we went through Genesis 18, it is not 100% certain what this Hebrew phrase means. You see it in the New King James translated, at the appointed time. The common understanding of this phrase when we encounter it elsewhere in the Scripture is that it means when a year has passed or this time next year.

So depending on the English translation that you use, you might be able to weasel around a little bit and say, well, maybe God didn't really say a year from now. I think if you just do the common word study and try to figure out using the standard means what the phrase signifies, that it indicates that a year is going to pass and she's going to have a son. So I don't feel comfortable squirming out from under the difficulty by saying, well, it didn't really mean a year.

What I do think is that the phrase the wombs are closed is susceptible to more than one interpretation. Not that they're closed meaning that they can't give birth, but that there's something the matter with them that they can't conceive. When it says that Abraham prays for Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants, then they conceived for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah.

And this is any sort of a prevention of pregnancy and giving birth to include some sort of problem, physical problem, where people are not going to even engage in intercourse because these women have all got something wrong with them. Their wombs are closed. You would know this right away.

If everybody in the household came down with an infection or with some other physical problem, and there are many, if you want to run your mind down that track, there's a lot of reasons why people would suddenly not be able to even make the attempt. This would

be something that's immediately obvious and immediately apparent and would require a healing, not just a... This word here for healing means healing of something that's wrong, the repair of leprosy or this kind of thing, a healing that involves taking away a disease. So, I think it is more likely that rather than sort of using the experimental method, well, let's try, oh, didn't get pregnant this month, well, let's keep trying.

Gosh, it's still obviously you're not pregnant going month after month after month and it's just stretched over a long period of time. This has to be fairly short because after this episode is concluded, Sarah has got to get pregnant and give birth to Isaac. So, this is a fairly short period of time, and this is my understanding of the passage.

I wouldn't die for this. There could be other ways that it's understood, but it makes the most sense to me. It fits with all of the statements that are made in the passage.

And it's also very important to our understanding of the passage that we kind of figure this out because these are obvious things. This isn't sort of a gradual dawning upon Abimelech that after six or eight months passes, what's the deal here? Nobody's getting pregnant. I mean, you can have a year or two go by before people realize that there are no new babies being born and you would only gradually realize there's a problem.

They are immediately aware. And apparently, Abimelech is aware when God appears to him. Remember what Abimelech says when God comes to him in verse 3 and says, indeed, you are dying because of the woman whom you have taken for she is a man's wife? And you get the idea that not only is he dying, but his whole household is dying.

Apparently, his whole nation is dying because Abimelech returns and says, Lord, will you slay a righteous nation also? Abimelech immediately makes the connection, this is why we're having this problem. This is why no one's giving birth. We're going to die as a people because we're having no offspring.

There have been episodes of Star Trek built around this. Suddenly, nobody has any more children and their race is going to die out and they go off trying to get other people's DNA and so forth because they can't reproduce. And so Abimelech, when God appears to him and says you're dying because you've taken this woman into your household, he draws the same conclusion that Pharaoh does in chapter 12.

This is why. This is why all the wombs are closed. This is why this plague has struck us where nobody can even make the attempt to conceive.

God's going to slay the entire nation over this woman. And so this is his response. He says, Lord, okay, fine, you're telling me I'm dying, but are you going to slay the whole nation over this? And this tells us something about Abimelech.

He is quick on the uptake. He immediately makes this connection. He immediately pieces together that the nation is not at fault.

If God is going to hold anybody accountable, he has to hold Abimelech, not the whole nation. This reminds us of the argument David is going to make later on when he says, after numbering the people and the people failed to pay the tax and so forth, and David says, well, I'm the one that instigated this. I numbered the people and made the tax necessary.

Why should all the people suffer because I was at fault? And so you get the idea here that Abimelech knows the things of God. He knows who God is. He knows the power that God has.

He immediately knows that this plague has come from God, that righteousness is involved here, and he makes an appeal based on the very same foundation that Abraham intercedes for Lot in chapter 18. Will Lord far be it from you to slay the righteous with the wicked? He doesn't deny that there's wickedness, that something wrong has taken place. Abraham doesn't.

He says there's wicked down there, but Lord, you can't slay the righteous with them. Abimelech makes the identical same argument. He has sort of switched places with Abraham here.

He's appealing for his people using the righteousness argument. That's what Abraham did for Lot. And what a convicting situation it is that here's Abimelech who's not privy to the counsels of God and the covenants of God and isn't in the special position of blessing that Abraham enjoys, and yet he's doing the Abraham thing.

He's sort of filling in for Abraham here. He's making the righteousness argument. Lord, you can't slay the righteous with the wicked.

Are you going to slay this righteous nation, this nation who is guiltless in this area for the sin that I have committed? And he, by the way, Abimelech, acknowledges his sin. He gives a reason for it. He says, I did not know what I was doing, but look at the end of verse 5. In the integrity of my heart and in the innocence of my hands, I have done this.

I have taken another man's wife. There are mitigating circumstances. I didn't know that that's what I was doing, but you remember the Levitical code that Moses will deliver to the children of Israel.

There are sins of which you are guilty even if they're committed in ignorance. If you defile yourself unwittingly, you still have to be cleansed. You still have to recognize the defilement.

You have to acknowledge it and you have to take action to be cleansed from it. And Abimelech apparently understands it. He acknowledges.

He says, I have done this. He doesn't say, Lord, I haven't committed adultery because

technically I didn't know I was taking... He says, I've done this. But I did it in integrity of heart.

I did it in cleanness of hands. But he says, I did it. This is more than Adam will do in the garden.

Or Eve. You know, you have the idea of seeking to shift blame and so forth and there's a little of that here, but Abimelech acknowledges what he's done. So, he explains this to the Lord.

Did he not say to me, she is my sister? She even herself said he is my brother. And God verifies that what Abimelech says is true. He says, yes, I know you did this in the integrity of your heart.

Now how many places in the Word of God is God Himself going to speak up and assign and declare integrity of heart to an unbeliever? I don't see it anywhere else in Scripture. I don't see God coming to an unbeliever and saying, yes, you're right. You have integrity of heart.

You are not to blame here. You're not evil. I withheld you from sinning against Me, he says.

I withheld you from sinning against Me. Believers are in a position to sin against God in their daily activities. This reminds us of what David says after the adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah.

Lord, against Thee and Thee only have I sinned. God says to Abimelech, I know that you were ignorant of these facts and I withheld you from sinning against Me. Not against Abraham, against Me.

So all of these things strongly suggest to me that Abimelech, like several others who are mentioned in the Scriptures, who are outside what we would consider to be the main line of the chosen people, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, what about Balaam? Balaam is a prophet of God. Balaam speaks blessings from God on the people of Israel. Balaam is confronted by an angel of God and has conversations with God.

Balaam is not an Israelite. He's a Gentile. So is Abimelech.

So are several others that we could point to in Scripture. But it's ironic here and intentionally ironic that Abimelech is in this case more righteous than Abraham. He is the offended party.

But he has been caused to sin by Abraham's failure. And God steps in. God intervenes.

God prevents Abimelech from consummating this sin. He preserves. And this story also emphasizes, see, this is what somebody is going to do.

And it's interesting that Scripture preserves this story because someone who doesn't believe in the veracity of Scripture and in the truth of God is going to say, well, you know how that Isaac came along. Abraham was probably impotent and that's why he couldn't have something happen to him. Maybe or maybe not he was the father of Ishmael.

Maybe or maybe not he was the father of Isaac. But you've got Sarah taken into somebody's harem and a year later she's having a child. Who's to say that Abimelech is not the father of Isaac? You have these suggestions and aspersions and doubts being cast on the process of the miracle.

The same kind of thing that happened when Jesus was born. The common assumption was that there was something untoward and something sinful involved in the birth of Jesus Christ because his parents weren't married and weren't engaging in physical relations at the time that he was conceived. Well, you have the same sort of a suggestion here that maybe there's something fishy about the conception of Isaac.

Well, this passage is persuasive for those who are persuaded by Scripture. That God says, I did not let you touch her. The passage points out later on that two or three times here in the passage he had not touched Sarah.

But he still has to take action. He is still under sentence of death from God even though this is a sin of ignorance. He's been put in this position by the actions and actually the failures and the lies of someone else.

But he's still accountable. Once he finds out about this, he's accountable. The plague that's on his household and the fact that he and his household and apparently his entire little city state there This is a little city state.

It's not a vast kingdom. But all of them are under the sentence of death. That's why he says, Are you going to slay the righteous nation here, the righteous people? God says, You have to restore the man's wife.

He is a prophet. And he will pray for you and you shall live. All of this is contingent on Abimelech restoring Sarah.

You restore Sarah. God says, He will pray for you and you will live. The implication here is if he doesn't pray for you, you're not going to live.

Otherwise, what's the point of the prayer of Abraham? If God says, Restore her and you'll live, what's Abraham's part in it? But he says, You'll restore her. He will pray for you. He's a prophet.

And you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours. And this is basically all of his subjects in the little kingdom of Gerar there.

So Abimelech, he takes this, when God speaks, Abimelech acts. He does exactly what God says without hesitation, without doubt, without second guessing. He doesn't call in his advisors.

He is a better model of response to the Word of God at this point than Abraham is who has walked with God. He's had more than dreams and visions. He's seen the smoking torch and the flaming torch and the burning pot and so forth.

So Abimelech says to Abraham, What have you in view that you have done this thing? Abraham gives his explanation. Well, I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place. And there's a little mini lesson in that statement for us.

It's real easy to prejudge. You'll notice that Abraham's trying to explain why he did this. This was the question we opened with this morning.

How does chapter 20 happen in the life of a believer that's experienced the things that Abraham has experienced? Well, he tells us right here. I was going to a place and I figured there's no fear of God here. I had better take steps.

He's looking. Where are his eyes? What's the definition of subjectivity? Eyes on people. Eyes on self.

Eyes on circumstances. All three of those are wrapped up in this statement. In this place.

Here's my circumstance. I'm down here in Gerar. Look at these people.

There's no fear of God in this place. They'll kill me. I don't want to die.

But I will die if I don't tell a lie. If I don't take some steps here, I'll die. Where is the appeal to God? Where is Abraham's looking to God? Oh, Lord.

First of all, why is he leaving the Popes of Mamre? Why is he heading south? Why is he heading back in the direction of old failures to begin with? Where is his thoughts about God? If God says I'm going to come back this year and Sarah's going to have a son, well then, who's going to kill you? How does this compare with chapter 12? In chapter 12, when Abraham went down, why did he go to Egypt? It was because of the famine. Abraham didn't trust God for provision. There, it was a lack of faith in the provision of God.

God had made promises to him. God had said this land is yours. I'm giving it to you and your descendants.

Abraham doesn't have any descendants yet, but he thinks he's going to starve to death. He doesn't go to God. He doesn't get down before the altar that he built at Bethel and say, God, you've given me this land.

He doesn't parlay the Word of God that's been delivered to him into action in his life. He doesn't make it the subject of his prayer. He doesn't come before God and say, God, you promised me this land.

How are you going to give me this land if I starve to death? And go to God and lean upon God, rely upon God, trust in God for provision. Instead, he heads south. He says, I know where I can get provision.

I'll go down to Egypt. Chapter 12 is primarily a failure of faith. And faith is one of the first things we have to get a grip on as a daily operation in our lives after we're saved.

But Abraham goes right back to Egypt. He might as well have gone back to Ur in terms of going back to old habits and old ways. Now, 25 years later, when Abraham goes to Ur, what's he thinking? Well, he left, but he didn't leave because of famine.

He left because he lost sight of the promise of God. This, to my perception, is a failure of hope. Because God said, I'm going to come back at the appointed time or this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

Abraham didn't seize onto that promise of the return of God. And we can win the faith battle, and now we're not worried about weathering the famines, and we're not worried about weathering circumstances, but we can get into just as bad a shape by losing our hope, by losing sight of those promises of God. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is the substance and at the center of our hope.

The promises of God are at the center of our hope and our expectation. And the first thing that happens, we don't know, there's no rationale given even in Abraham's explanation here of why he left Mamre. But we know that one thing he forgot is the promise of the return of God.

And when he forgot that promise, he drifted out of the land. He went clear out of the land of promise just because he didn't seize onto the last word that he got from God. Why does God speak to Abimelech and not to Abraham? Because Abraham is not listening to the word he's already got.

What's the point of speaking more words to a man who's not listening to the words he's already got? This is our problem today, isn't it? We don't need a direct revelation from God. We don't need a vision or a dream or an incarnate appearance. We don't need to see people say, oh, I want to go to the Holy Land.

I want to walk where Jesus walked. I wish I had been back there in the days of the apostles. If I could have seen the Lord Jesus, what a difference it would make in my life.

No, it wouldn't. It wouldn't make any difference at all. Because the word you already have is just as compelling.

It's just as powerful. It's just as much a reason for motivation for faith and motivation for hope as any of those other things. And look at Abraham.

Abraham had those things and walked right out of the land and walked right back into an old pattern of failure. Why? Because he didn't keep his sights set on the promise of God's return, on the promise of God's covenant, the status that he had before God. He just drifted right out of the land, drifted right over the border.

And in this way, he is similar. Look at the parallels here. We've talked about the contrasts and comparisons with chapter 12, his first lie about Sarah.

Look at the comparisons to Lot in chapter 19. Abraham and Lot are both resident aliens outside the land by choice. Lot leaves the land of promise and goes to Sodom.

Abraham leaves the land of promise and goes to Gerar. And both of them are aliens. They're living among foreigners by choice.

They choose it on purpose of their own free will. There's no compelling reason for either one of them to go. You could argue about, well, Lot and the arguments his herdsmen are having.

That's a solvable problem that Lot didn't solve. Both of them will sacrifice a woman or women for their personal safety. Lot is willing to sacrifice his daughters.

Abraham is willing to sacrifice Sarah out of fear. There's fear that something bad is going to happen. Lot fears that the crowd is going to press in and take the messengers and so forth.

Abraham fears that Abimelech and the Gerarites are going to seize him and kill him. And so, both of them are willing to sacrifice someone else out of fear. In both accounts, there's an emphasis on the intercession of Abraham.

Oddly, because Abraham is on the righteous side in one story and the unrighteous side on the other, but both accounts stress Abraham's intercession. Abraham has to pray for someone before everything's okay. He prays for Lot and Lot is delivered.

Lot is delivered because God remembers Abraham. In this story, even though God speaks to Abimelech, God is not going to deliver Abimelech from the sentence of death until Abraham prays. Because Abraham is the channel of blessing.

Israel is in the loins of Abraham. You remember you get over there to Hebrews chapter 7 where it's talking about Melchizedek and it talks about the Levites and the fact that when Abraham brought gifts and worshiped with Melchizedek and paid Melchizedek a tithe, that the Levites were in his loins. And the whole Levitical priesthood acknowledged the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood when Abraham paid a tithe to

Melchizedek.

And the idea is there in Scripture that all of Israel is in the loins of Abraham. Well, it is through Abraham and his descendants, i.e., the nation of Israel, that all the world will be blessed. God says, this is my channel of blessing.

Not only is Israel in the loins of Abraham, Jesus Christ himself, the Messiah of Israel, is, by extension, that is the branch, that is the root shoot, that is the way that God is going to deliver and bless. It's not just the existence of the nation of Israel, it's the deliverance in Jesus Christ, who comes from Israel. That's how, ultimately, all the nations are going to be blessed.

And so even Abimelech here, talking directly to God, he has got to come to deliverance through Abraham, i.e., through Israel, i.e., ultimately, through that channel of grace and channel of deliverance that Abraham represents, the promises that God makes through him. So, there is a lot going on in this passage. There's the comparison here to Lot that we're in the middle of here, the intercession or appeal based on God's righteousness.

The appeals that are based here are both on the righteousness of God. Abimelech understands God's righteousness. God, it's not right for you to slay the innocent with the guilty.

Same argument that Abraham made. Both of these take place outside the promised land. These issues are raised because someone has chosen to sojourn outside the land of promise.

You get the idea, if Lot had remained in the land, this Sodom thing would have never come up. You get the idea that if Abraham had stayed at Mamre, this would have never come up. It is a result of loss of focus, loss of recognition of the Word of God and what it means.

The last time Abraham himself did this in chapter 12, he's spoken with God, he's had revelation from God, but he's not parlaying that into daily decisions in the light of God's Word and God's promise. Famine comes up, hardship hits, he heads south. Later here in Genesis 20, he loses sight of the promise of God about a son and he's drifting south again and he gets into trouble again.

The bottom line here is don't forget the promise. We are heirs of God according to promise. We are children of God according to promise.

We are fellow heirs with Christ according to promise. We will get in trouble. It doesn't matter how many great victories or how many accomplishments or how many wonderful blessings we've enjoyed.

It doesn't matter if we've had a mountaintop experience with God. If we lose sight of

what God has said, if we forget His promise, we're going to make the Genesis 12 mistake and head south in times of pressure. We're going to make the Genesis 20 mistake and we're going to head south in times of distraction, in times of loss of focus.

And once we lose that focus, God doesn't speak directly anymore. And this also tells us something about divine guidance and divine communication. Because there's lots of believers today who look for the will of God or divine guidance or they see God telling them things in circumstances or they see God telling them things through other people.

Abimelech is going to go talk to Abraham. But you'll notice in these passages, whether it's Genesis 12 or Genesis 19 or Genesis 20, when God speaks and when God acts here and He's not talking to Abraham, He goes to Abimelech and He's going to use Abimelech to bring Abraham back into line. But He doesn't reveal truth to Abraham through Abimelech, does He? He doesn't give Abimelech a message for Abraham.

He talks to Abimelech and Abimelech confronts Abraham and then Abraham has to go to the Lord to pray so that the household will be healed. God uses people and God uses circumstances to focus our attention back on the Word that is already in our soul. We don't get new information from circumstances.

We don't get new information from people. We get situations that refocus our attention on what we should have been paying attention to all along. It's the Word of God that communicates the will of God.

It's not circumstances. We don't go out and throw grass up in the air and see which way the wind's blowing. Well, the wind's blowing from the north today.

I think God must be telling me to do A or God must be telling me to do B. There's so many believers today who decide what they're going to do because they say, well, these circumstances seem to be leading me in this direction. These circumstances seem to be pointing in this direction. You never know if your circumstances are in that frame of mind.

How do you know if circumstances are orchestrated by God or orchestrated by the enemy? Or if you're interpreting them in the light of what you secretly have from your fallen nature? Circumstances, when God uses circumstances, it is not to give us information. It's not to give us a path or a purpose or a decision. It is to steer us back to the Word, to what God has said, His promises, His principles, His doctrines.

That's where the guidance comes from. When we encounter circumstances, what we need to do is focus our attention back on God's Word. What does God's Word say should happen in this situation? Because sometimes there'll be a famine in the land.

Is God saying with the famine, leave the land? He did that with His people in other circumstances. There would be a famine and they had to leave. There's a famine in the

land when Jacob goes down to Egypt to join Joseph.

Was it God's will for Jacob to go down and join Joseph? Yes, it was. Well, there was a famine in the land that drove him to it, so does a famine mean stick or does a famine mean go? It doesn't mean either one. A famine means get your attention back on the Word of God and base your decisions and your actions on what the Word of God says.

Abimelech speaks to Abraham. Pharaoh speaks to Abraham. Well, is this God speaking through these people? Maybe, maybe not.

The issue that's raised when someone is confronted, sometimes a king speaks, Pharaoh's going to speak to Moses and tell him they can't leave. Well, that's not a word from God. Every time Pharaoh speaks, is this God talking to us? The point is these things drive us back to where we came from.

We've departed from the place of the presence of God. We've departed from focus on the Word of God, the promise of God that we ought to be basing our actions on. And God will use circumstances.

God will use other people to refocus us on what we already know. Don't be looking to people to give you fresh information about what God wants. Don't be looking in circumstances to get fresh information about what God wants.

These are occasions to bring us back to faith, to bring us back to hope, to bring us back to the operation of the resources that God has planted inside our souls. This is the great failing in the area of divine guidance that we see so often today. There is a lot that we could say about the larger themes that are spoken of here that I'll perhaps save for another time.

I will just suggest for your meditations the idea here that the intercessory ministry of Abraham is part of his function. God tells Abimelech, he is a prophet. He will pray for you.

We've already seen Abraham come before God and pray for Lot. There is a legitimate ministry of intercession on the part of those who are close to God, and that includes us. We can't rest on our laurels.

We can't assume that because great things have happened or because we've made progress, because God has revealed a lot to us, that we're on solid ground no matter what we do. In a matter of weeks, Abraham is in just as deep a failure as he was 25 years earlier. The same thing can happen to us if we lose our focus on faith, if we lose our focus on hope, if we stop looking to God and God's word and God's will to find the answers to our questions, to find the right option when we face decisions.

If we start looking at circumstances, if we start looking at people, if we start operating out of fear, if we start trying to preserve ourselves, we're going to go astray just as fast

and fall just as hard as Abraham does here. God will use whatever is necessary to try to bring our attention back to where it belongs. The wonderful thing is, look at how God intervenes.

God won't let us go far without starting to throw roadblocks in our path and raising those warning signals to get us back on the path. We've got to be sensitive to those things and we've got to be responsive. To Abraham's credit, he does respond.

He does get back in the right path. It's just in time because in the next chapter, Isaac is going to be born. That's where we'll pick up next time.

Let's close here in prayer. Father, we thank you for your provision for us, your gracious oversight of us as our Heavenly Father. We thank you that you teach us through your word.

You focus our attention on the things of your word and the daily details and circumstances of our lives. We pray that as a result of studying these things, we will be more sensitive to your word that is already resident in our souls, that we will have a keener ear for the voice of the Holy Spirit, that we won't lose sight of those things that are the object of our faith. We won't lose sight of those things that provide our motivation and the hope of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the forward progress of your plan as it pertains to us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.