

Commentary Highlights

Genesis 20:1-18

NAC	New American Commentary
PTW	Preaching the Word
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
GIG	Gleanings in Genesis
CAL	Genesis: Calvin's Commentary
SOG	The Story of God Bible Commentary
BKW	Genesis by Bruce K Waltke
KUR	Genesis by Abraham Kuruvilla
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
APR	Creation and Blessing

****The views presented in these commentary excerpts may not reflect the general understanding of these passages as expressed by Faith Bible Church, but are presented to help us better understand the Scriptures and how various scholars have interpreted them****

Genesis 20:1-7

(NAC) – “Abraham journeys “between Kadesh and Shur”, the region where earlier Hagar fled. The modern identification of Gerar is uncertain...There is agreement that it was located in western Negev near Gaza. Gerar marks the southern boundary of Canaan in 10:19.”

(SOG) – “Abraham, for reasons that are left unexplained, moves south through the Negev...Gerar [was] a Philistine city that is between Beersheba and Gaza.”

(PTW) – “Abraham resorted to the same sin that he had committed in Egypt right after receiving the promise of posterity that had precipitated his leaving Ur by faith. Now, decades later, not long after receiving the explicit dated promise of a son by Sarah, he commits the same old sin!”

(PTW) – “Abraham’s clinging sin when pressured was to trust himself rather than God...But sometimes when pushed, he decided to give God a little help with a “little” lie.” This episode is reminiscent of the author of Hebrews description of sin in Hebrews 12:1 which describes sin as, “sin which so easily entangles us.”

(KUR) – “There is no mention here of Sarah’s beauty; she is now 90 years old and is, in her own words, “worn out.””

(NAC) – ““Abimelech” (my father is king) is identified as “king” of Gerar; the name occurs later in chap. 26, when Isaac attempts the same deception. Like the name Pharaoh, “Abimelech” may be the throne name for the Gerarites.”

(KUR) – “Astonishingly, after the two-fold promise that Isaac would be born to Abraham and Sarah, Sarah is taken away—nay, given away—into the harem of a local ruler...Abraham displays a certain recklessness with the promise...But even in this story of Abraham’s faithlessness and lack of trust, one finds evidence that God’s word does in fact come to pass.”

(NAC) – “That Abraham repeated his wife-sister deception suggests that wife stealing was a common threat. The abduction of Sarah is reported briefly without reason. The prior Egyptian incident credits Sarah’s beauty for her abduction as does Rebekah’s in the later Isaac-Abimelech episode, but the silence of the passage on this crucial count may indicate another consideration, such as forging an economic relationship with the Abraham clan, was the king’s motive. The chronology requires that Sarah was ninety years old, and furthermore she describes herself as “worn out.””

(SOG) – “The narrative moves quickly from the report that Abimelech has taken Sarah to the account of a dream in which God warns him that his relationship with the matriarch will lead to the death penalty.”

(BKW) – “On the brink of Isaac’s conception, the program of redemption is placed in jeopardy. There is no doubt that salvation depends on the faithful Lord, not on unfaithful humans.”

(NAC) – “Hebrew (לקח), “has taken,” is a play on the idea of marriage, for the word is a common idiom meaning “to marry.” Mosaic legislation required the death penalty for adultery, both the man and the woman (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). It is termed a “great sin” and treated as a sin against God.”

(NAC) – “In Hittite law the adulterer who can prove his ignorance of the woman’s marital status at the time of the offense is acquitted. Abimelech makes this argument in his defense, but ignorance alone doesn’t absolve the man in God’s eyes; there must be a return of the woman and a mediation by her husband.”

(BKW) – “Dreams were a mode of revelation, even to those outside of the covenant.”

(PTW) – In regard to Abimelech’s speech to God in his dream, “Abimelech was indeed telling the truth. So God informed the king that it was his omniscience and his omnipotence that had kept Abimelech from violating Sarah, and further that the king must return Sarah.”

(NAC) – “The failure of the king to consummate the marriage with Sarah probably is the result of a fatal disease impacting his sexual function. Anyway, it is the Lord’s intervention alone that in fact saved him from committing adultery; in effect, he was saved from himself...God knows as well as Abimelech the circumstances of the abduction...God

himself was the one restraining Abimelech's sexual appetite so that he did not permit the king even to "touch" Sarah...The inference of the divine speech is that the Philistine's "clear conscience" occurred only by the gracious intervention of God."

(KUR) – "Abimelech is kept from sin by Yahweh."

(SOG) – "Interestingly, in the Egyptian episode there was no clear statement that the Pharaoh had not had sexual relations with Sarah. The narrator here goes to great pains to announce that Abimelech had not touched her."

(NAC) – "Here the divine revelation to the Philistine confirms that Abraham is a "prophet," the first occasion of the word in Scripture. Abraham is considered a prophet by virtue of his mediatorial role; he is not the founder or model of the prophetic institution of Israel. However, he is the first in Scripture to intercede with God on behalf of others."

(NAC) – "Abimelech's salvation ironically lies with the husband whom he offended; the "nation" cannot survive apart from the benevolence of this chosen mediator of God."

(NAC) – God tells Abimelech that if Sarah is not returned "You and all yours will die."

Genesis 20:8-13

(NAC) – "The ancient world believed dreams were a common means of divine visitation; Abimelech's remarkable account of his dream justified the citizens' unimaginable fear. Perhaps the literary linkage of chap. 20 with the context of the Sodom episode implies that the fear generated by Sodom's catastrophe still lingered in the region."

(KUR) – "This is the first instance of "fear of God" in Scripture, and it seems quite clear that it was not Abimelech and his men who did not have this fear of God...One is forced to conclude that it was Abraham, the patriarch, who did not have enough fear of God to trust him to take care of this dangerous situation...His was a faith adulterated by fear of the wrong things. His was not a faith marked by a fear of God...How ironic that the pagan chief is exceedingly solicitous—God-fearing—when the supposedly godly patriarch does not even care about his wife!"

(PTW) – "Abimelech the pagan Canaanite, acted more righteously than righteous Abraham...Abraham's fears were grounded in his own momentary lack of respect and reverential awe of God...Father Abraham was less of a saint than we might have concluded from the preceding chapters. And here he had little or no witness with Abimelech and his people, who were, after all, a microcosm of the nations that were to be blessed through Abraham."

(BKW) – "Fear of God, this phrase should be distinguished from "fear of the Lord." The latter refers to respect for the special revelation of Scripture, which "fear of God" involves general

revelation, moral standards known by humans through conscience and accepted by them out of fear of God's judgment."

(NAC) – "'Fear of God" means in this context conformity to a moral code of behavior, not the absence of religion. The "fear of God" characterizes rulers who act justly (Gen 42:18; 2 Sam 23:3; 2 Chr 26:5; Neh 5:15)."

(SOG) – "One who fears God obeys him, recognizing God's superior power and wisdom. The irony may be seen that if anyone can be said not to fear God in this story it is Abraham himself."

(NAC) – Regarding marrying your sister, "the early practical effect of endogamy is preservation of the family's religious tradition. Mosaic legislation, however, repudiated certain forms of endogamy, such as a man's marriage to his sister and marriages to sisters (Lev 18:9, 11, 18; Deut 27:22)."

(SOG) – In verse 13, "Abraham here says that he did this "everywhere" they went. This comment shows that Abraham not only lied in Egypt and here in Gerar, but all the time and everywhere they went to a potentially hostile location...While occasionally reacting with confidence, typically [Abraham] reacts with fear, self-protection, and manipulation. To hear that he still tries to protect himself putting his wife at risk shows that Abraham is still the same old Abram of Genesis 12."

Genesis 20:14-18

(PTW) – Abraham's folly was met by amazing grace...And grace also went out to Abimelech."

(NAC) – "The king compensates the couple in three ways: (1) to Abraham he delivers livestock and servants and returns Sarah; (2) to Abraham he offers land; and (3) speaking to Sarah, he announces a gift of silver to "her brother." The first provision recalls the items of restitution made by Pharaoh (12:16), but more importantly the king returns the woman as demanded by God. The second reward of land is the opposite response of Pharaoh who expelled the couple; Abimelech sees an advantage in forming a friendly relationship with this "prophet" of God...The third element of restitution involved a hefty payment of silver. Relatively speaking, the figure of one thousand shekels is remarkably generous; four hundred shekels purchased Machpelah (23:15-16), on hundred shekels a piece of land at Shechem (33:1), and a mere twenty shekels the purchase of a slave (37:28)."

(KUR) – "Fifty shekels of silver was the going rate for a bride (Deut 22:29), and average monthly wage was about half a shekel. Thus, Abimelech's thousand pieces of silver donated to Abraham was an extravagant compensation."

(BKW) – "This is a fabulously large sum. A Babylonian laborer, usually paid a half shekel per month, would have had to work 167 years to earn such a sum."

(SOG) – In verse 17, Abraham fills the role of a prophet by providing intercessory prayer on behalf of Abimelech, asking God to no longer punish this king and his house.

(NAC) – Concerning vv. 17-18, “the inversion in the two verses makes it clear that on account of Abimelech’s mistreatment of Sarah the Philistines experienced barrenness, which was reversed as a consequence of Abimelech’s new benevolence toward the man.”

(NAC) – “Philistine infertility also contributes in two additional ways to the account: (1) the penalty, including Abimelech’s own wife, corresponds with the nature of the crime, since the abduction imperiled Sarah’s sexual and maternal reputation; and (2) the penalty confirms that neither Sarah nor anyone else could be pregnant.”

(NAC) – “Infertility is treated in the Old Testament as a physical disease. It is counted as a curse against the Israelites for covenant disobedience and, oppositely, the fruitful womb is divine blessing...Only God could reverse their hopeless condition.”

(NAC) – “Two walls of protection therefore are in view in this chapter: the king could not engage in sexual relations, and the women could not conceive. This ensured that the child Isaac was indeed of Abraham and Sarah. From beginning to end the story concerns protecting Sarah’s sexual honor, for as the “wife of Abraham,” her miraculous conception testifies to the veracity of God’s promise to husband and wife.”

(KUR) – “The divine threat of 20:3, 7, we learn later, concerns the closure of wombs in Abimelech’s household; yet there may have been some sort of physical affliction upon the man himself, for he is said to have been healed when Abraham prays for him (20:17). In other words, God’s faithfulness to his word is manifest: there will be no possibility that Sarah is violated.”

Conclusion:

(SOG) – Quoting John Walton, Tremper Longman writes, “Abraham emerges from the narrative with his power and authority no only intact but enhanced. That is, the one who lies...is still the one preferred. The morally upright one [Abimelech] is still dependent on Israel. The preeminence of Abraham here rests not on Abraham’s virtue, but on God’s promise...The story has a strangeness about it, perhaps because the theological narrator wanted to make a point that ill-fitted the traditional material with which he had to work. As it stands, the text makes the claim that Abraham is the chosen of God, not by words, nor even by faith (which is feeble here), but only by God’s incredible grace. Thus, we can hardly advance on Calvin’s summary, “The infirmity of man and the grace of God...” The infirmity of both men is evident. But God’s grace overrules.”

Bibliography

Atkinson, David J. *The Message of Genesis 1-11*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990.

Calvin, John. *Genesis*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001.

Hughes, R. Kent. *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004.

Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Genesis*. A Theological Commentary for Preachers. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2014.

Longman III, Tremper. *Genesis*. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Mathews, K.A. *Genesis 1-11:26*. Vol. 1A. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.

Phillips, Richard D.. *Genesis: Vol 1: Genesis 1-19*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023.

Pink, Arthur Walkington. *Gleanings in Genesis*. Gearhart, OR: Watchmaker Publishing, 2011.

Ross, Allen P.. *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998.

Waltke, Bruce K.. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan Academic, 2001.