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Old Testament Literature

20, February 2023

In Defense of Abraham

In both accounts from the book of Genesis, Abram is put in a position where he must lie about his relationship with his wife in order to avoid death. In Genesis 12 and 20 we see Abraham enter a new land (Egypt in Gen. 12 and Gerar in Gen. 20), and knowing that Sarah was too beautiful, he lied. Abraham told the Pharaoh and king respectively that Sarah was his sister so that they would not kill him in order to marry her. In both circumstances, this lie saved Abram's life however God punished the ruling families for the transgression (disease for the Pharaoh and infertility for Abimelek's family).

While Genesis 12 and 20 have a lot of similarities there are also distinct differences in the final outcomes of the stories. For example, both rulers took in Sarah no questions asked, but it was Abimelek who was given a dream where God warned him that Sarah was already married and that not fixing the situation would result in death. This is far different than what happened to the Pharaoh who was not warned of the lie, he only knew something was wrong because his family was struck with diseases by God. Another interesting contrast is tracking how Abraham had benefitted throughout both instances. For example, with the Pharaoh, Abram gained cattle and wealth by just offering up Sarah, and once they were told to leave they only left with what they had. However, in the land of Gerar Abraham and his family only gained the 25 pounds of silver, sheep, cattle, and slaves AFTER the dispute with Sarah.

I feel as though Abraham made the correct choices in both situations. He made the hardest decision in trusting that God would protect him and that is exactly what happened in both situations. God turned a scary situation of entering an unknown land into a place where Abraham could gain wealth and inevitably live with his wife again. God specified that He had “kept (Abimelek) from sinning against me. That is why I did not let (him) touch her” so even when handed to the strongest authority, God showed he was always in control of the situation (Gen. 20:6).

The intentional detail that God “healed Abimelek, his wife, and his female slaves so they could have children again” reminds me of the tower of Babel and God’s will to “multiply and fulfill the earth” (Gen. 20:17, Varughese, pg.73). These stories take place after the great flood and since God made a covenant with Noah, there would be no more disasters wiping out humanity. It seems as though God was making it a priority to bless and protect Abraham no matter where he is. This is also evident by God’s promise to Abram that he would one day make a great nation.

Ultimately these stories go to show the way God used those He deemed “worthy” and “righteous” in the old testament. It is probably not a coincidence that God showed more mercy to Abimelek than Pharaoh as he was more willing to allow Abraham to “live wherever (he) like” and begin what is the start of the Israelites (Gen. 20:15). As far as the impact these stories can have on my life, I think something I’ve learned throughout this class is that there is more to the old testament than just rules and history. I think it is easy to relate to Abraham here, in a new place confused about who to be as the truth just might be the hardest thing to say. I feel that these stories set a great example of faith, and God as a protector. It is made obvious that humans are created in the image of God and thus we are the creation he wants to protect and grow. God

showed his commitment to the covenant he made with Abram and thus, Abraham was able to be the prophet that he was always supposed to be.

Work Cited

The Bible, New International Version

Branson, Robert, et al. Discovering the Old Testament: Story and Faith, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, 2003, p. 73.