

BIBLE STUDY: Genesis 20

Our theme this year is 'Speak Out, Give Hope'.

In this story we are presented with an opportunity to focus on the characters of Abraham, Abimelek and Sarah, and to ask some simple, yet useful, questions. It is a story that perhaps we feel is distant from the realities of human trafficking.

FEAR is paralysing. It can stop a person in their tracks. We know that fear is something most victims feel – fear of authority and fear of those who help. In Job 4:14 we read of how Job was seized by fear. It's painful and can be a debilitating emotion. The psalmist writes in Psalm 55:5: 'Fear and trembling have beset me.'

Out of fear, Abram [Abraham] told a lie – and not for the first time. It was the same lie as before (see Genesis 12:10-13). It seems it was easy for Abraham to return to his old ideas of fixing a situation. He tried to deal with it himself instead of asking for help and trusting God.

1. How does fear affect you?
2. Have you ever tried to manipulate a situation instead of allowing God to lead and others to help?
3. How easy is it to slip into old ways?

TRUTH is not always easy to hear. As President Barack Obama said, regarding talks on climate change: 'Sticking your head in the sand might make you feel safer, but it's not going to protect you from the coming storm.'

Abraham's fear had pushed him to tell lies and put Sarah in danger. Abimelek – a pagan king with a harem of many women – heard the voice of truth during his sleep. Clearly the voice of God spoke to him and told him of his error. Truth was made known. In the Bible, when truth is spoken we see lives changed.

Psalm 25:5 states: 'Guide me in your truth'. It's not a given that we know the way of truth. We need direction and help to navigate the untruths. It's a relationship and a discipline. Here is the important part – God spoke up for Sarah, the victim.

Abimelek was set free from a heavy punishment by God. Jesus tells us in John 8:32: 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'

1. What truths do we need to hear daily from God?
2. What truth could set us free?
3. Who do we allow to speak truth into our lives?

HOPE. Abimelek, a pagan king, had a harem, into which arrived Sarah, aged 90. Both were placed into a situation where things could go wrong.

- Abimelek – a victim who could change a situation and give hope;
- Sarah – a victim who received hope for the future.

Abimelek's name means 'father of a king' – a common name similar to that of Pharaoh – and the Philistine pagan king was among the early settlers in Gerar. He was a king who heard and acted upon the voice of God, offering hope even through punishment to Sarah.

Every victim of human trafficking needs someone to offer them hope and the opportunity to change the situation. Someone must speak up and give hope, and in this passage, a non-believer heard the voice of God and spoke up.

1. When have we heard God speak?
2. How have we heard God speak?
3. What situation can we speak out about to bring hope to someone today?

RESTORATION for the victims. The dream is that every victim of human trafficking will be fully restored to live an abundant life.

The Bible tells us about the restoration in individuals' lives. In Job chapter 42, we read: 'After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before' (v 10).

The Hebrew word used was יָכַח (*yakach*) – 'set right'. Sarah had been wronged and was set right, or 'found right' as some commentators suggest, because of her humility. Both are true. Restoration comes through trust and a renewed belief in God.

Through a healing touch or meeting, Jesus restored people to health. It's about health.

- Sarah was restored to Abraham;
- Abraham was given value;
- Abimelek was seen and 'noted by God'.

Like Sarah, we must humble ourselves to be restored. Have we experienced this?

Is there a situation – relationship, friend, colleague, partner or service user – where we can bring hope by allowing them to encounter God?