**The Wells of Genesis Series**

**“Abraham and Abimelech: The Well of Oath”**

**Genesis 21.22-34**

**Introduction**

Currently we are looking at seven different events that took place around water wells or springs in the book of Genesis. Water wells were gathering places where important decisions and events often occurred. I believe that the Lord can use these experiences to shape our lives for the glory of God.

This morning’s text will come from Genesis chapter twenty-one when Abraham meets with Abimelech at the well of Beersheba.

Let’s read the narrative this recorded in Genesis chapter twenty-one.

***22****Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do;****23****now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.”****24****Abraham said, “I swear it.”****25****But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.****26****And Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today.”*

***27****Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.****28****Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.* ***29****Abimelech said to Abraham, “What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?”****30****He said, “You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well.”****31****Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.****32****So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines.****33****Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.****34****And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.*

**Beersheba**

By this time Abraham was around 100 years old and had lived a nomadic life for 25 years. (Gen.21.5; 12.4) Twenty-five years is a long time to live in a tent. I like camping as much as the next guy but usually after a couple nights I’m ready for a hot shower and my comfortable bed. Over the past 25 years Abraham relocated seventeen times living as an alien in the land of promise. (Heb.11.9) According to the Census Bureau the average person moves 12 times in their lifetime. So, Abraham was much higher than the national average.

But now, it was time for Abraham to settle down in one place. And that place was Beersheba. Beersheba was most southern point of the Promise Land. The phrase “From Dan to Beersheba” a distance of about 144 miles became the usual way of designating the whole Promised Land.

Remember the Lord said to Abraham, after Lot has separated from him, *“Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.”* (Gen.13.14-15) So of all the places Abraham could have settled down why did he settle in Beersheba?

According the moving company Allied Van Lines the main reasons people make long distance moves is to be closer to family, job and career changes, livability, climate and environment, and a fresh start. But what made Beersheba that special place for Abraham? Well, one reason is because Isaac, the promised child, had been born and Abraham and Sarah needed a place to raise their son. (Gen.21.1-7)

But I believe a bigger reason is that Beersheba reminded Abraham of God’s covenant promise, God’s oath to Abraham. And that’s why this episode is recorded on the pages of Scripture. Let’s face it the Bible could have simply said, “And Abraham settled in Beersheba” and we would have been satisfied. We don’t need this whole narrative describing the interaction between Abraham and Abimelech unless it is suppose to mean something. As a matter of fact this odd passage is between two major events in Abraham’s life the birth of Isaac and the sacrifice of Isaac and many times people jump from over this passage all together. (Gen.21.1-7; ch.22)

Abraham would live at Beersheba for the next 75 years until his death. And outside of burying his wife Sarah in Hebron, Abraham would dwell in Beersheba. Why, because Beersheba reminded Abraham of God’s covenant promise. This episode between Abraham and Abimelech was God mirroring His covenant promises to Abraham in real time.

Let me explain.

***22****Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do;****23****now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.”****24****Abraham said, “I swear it.”*

**The Lord is Gracious**

Abimelech was the king over the entire region of Gerar. (Gen.20.2b) We are introduced to Abimelech in chapter twenty when Abraham and Sarah journeyed and made camp in Gerar. (Gen.20.1)

Sarah was a beautiful woman even in old age, and Abraham feared that Abimelech would kill him in order to take Sarah as his wife. So, Abraham and Sarah lied to the king telling him that Sarah was his sister. (Gen.20.2a) This is a tactic that Abraham and Sarah had used before. (Gen.12.10-20; 20.13) The problem is that it was a lie and there was the possibility that Abimelech would sleep with Sarah and destroy God’s plan to bring the promised son through Abraham and Sarah. (Gen.18.10) So the Lord came to the king in a dream and told him the truth. Abimelech rose early that next morning and confronted the couple.

*Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.* *Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.”* *To Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.”*(Gen.20.14-16)

Abraham and Sarah took the king up on his offer and settled in the region. A few years go by and Isaac is a little boy when one day Abimelech and the commander of his army, Phicol, pay Abraham a visit. One can imagine the thoughts that ran through Abraham’s mind when he saw the king and his general pulling up in the driveway. “This is it! Abimelech is going to kill me or run me out of town. He’s taking back his gracious offer. He’s offended in how I lied to him. He’s tired of me squatting on his land. He brought his Phicol for muscle.”

How utterly surprised Abraham must had been when he heard Abimelech say, *“God is with you in all that you do; now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.”* (Gen.21.22-23)

Abraham didn’t deserve the grace the king was offering. As a matter of fact Abraham deserved the exact opposite. Brothers and sisters, we should always be surprised by grace! The Lord is showing Abraham once again that He is a God of grace. You can’t earn it and you don’t deserve it but the Lord freely gives it. The Lord is showing Abraham through Abimelech what He will eventually do through Jesus Christ. *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*(Eph.2.8-9)

**The Lord brings Peace**

Notice that in Abimelech’s gracious offer to allow Abraham to sojourn in the land is the element of peace. Abimelech said to Abraham, “*according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.”* Abimelech is asking Abraham to swear by God that they will dwell together in the land in peace. And Abraham swears to it.

But Abraham takes the opportunity to inform the king about the conflict and strife surrounding a well of water that Abraham had dug but the king’s servants had seized and unjustly appropriated for themselves. Abimelech admits that he never knew about this conflict and even though Abraham was an alien living on the king’s land the king restores Abraham as the rightful owner of the well and establishes peace. *Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant*. (21.27) The Lord is showing Abraham through this covenant with Abimelech that He is a God of peace. The Lord is showing Abraham through this covenant the peace He will eventually establish through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is our peace. (Micah 5.5; Eph.2.14) *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Rom.5.1) Jesus Christ through the blood of the eternal covenant broke down the dividing wall of hostility that existed between God and us. (Heb.13.20; Eph.2.13-16) *And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens.*(Eph.2.17-19a)

In addition Abraham gave Abimelech seven lambs to secure the well as his personal property.

*Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Abimelech said to Abraham, “What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?” He said, “You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well.”* (Gen.21.28-30)

**The Lord brings Security**

By offering Abimelech these seven lambs Abraham secured possession of the well for centuries to come. Understand what this means! The one who is an alien, having no rights or privileges now is acknowledged as a full member of the community with all rights and privileges because of the declaration of the king. Doesn’t this sound so much like the Gospel? As the Apostle Paul tells us, “Through Christ you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints, you are of God’s household.” (Eph.2.19) Through act of God’s free grace through Christ, we are received into the number and have a right and all the privileges of the sons of God. (WSC#34)

Seven is God’s number. Seven is the perfect number. The Lord uses the number seven in Scripture to show completeness and perfection (both physical and spiritual). We first see tied directly to God's creation of all things when He *blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His which God had created and made.* (Gen.2.3)

What is interesting is that Abraham gave Abimelech seven lambs to be a witness and provide endless security from the thief that seeks to steal and kill and destroy. (Jn.10.10) Abraham’s gift of seven lambs was a foreshadowing of God’s perfect redemption through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The seven lambs prefigured the completeness of God’s redemption through Christ and eternal security we enjoy through the work of the perfect Lamb of God.

Brothers and sisters, we were redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. (IPt.1.19) *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.* (Rev.5.12)

*Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.*(Gen.21.31) Beersheba means “well of oath” or “oath well”

*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.*(Gen.21.33)

The tamarisk tree is a hardy tree that can tolerate the desert climate. It is a shade tree that can grow up to 25 feet tall. It is an evergreen and produces white or pink flowers at any time during the year. What is unique about the tamarisk tree is that during the heat of the day the tree secretes salt. The salt dries and during the night the salt absorbs water from the air. In the morning the water evaporates creating a sort of natural air-conditioning.

It seems that Abraham wanted to memorialize the Everlasting God by planting a hardy evergreen tree that would always survive and be just like God Himself, an Everlasting God. The tree was a place where Abraham could be refreshed over and over again in the cool comfort of God’s presence.

**Closing Thought**

*And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.* (Gen.21.31)

Well, that’s an under statement. As I said earlier, Abraham would live at Beersheba for the next 75 years until his death. So, of all the places that Abraham could have settled why did he settle in Beersheba? Because Beersheba reminded him of God’s covenant promises and pointed to the fulfillment of God’s promise through Jesus Christ. Beersheba reminded Abraham that the Lord is gracious, the Lord brings peace, and the Lord brings security. I believe that every time Abraham sat under that tamarisk tree he was refreshed in God’s covenant promises that God is gracious to undeserving sinners. That God brings peace in the midst of hostility. That God provides the security of eternal life through Jesus Christ and no one will ever snatch us out of His hand. (Jn.10.28)

And that is what the Lord wants for you today. He wants you to be refreshed by His covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Lord wants you to enjoy His grace. The Lord wants to bring you peace. The Lord wants to rest in His security.

**Call to Prayer**

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;* (Ps.103.2)