

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba

Genesis 21:22-34

Introduction: Keeping a Word of Honor

Context: God's perfect faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah

But also: Abraham's lie to Abimelech concerning Sarah (Genesis 20)

Will Abraham learn to be like his heavenly Father... keeping his word of honor?

Our age is an age of dishonor when it comes to keeping our word

- Marriage vows are made and later broken
- Business deals and agreements are consummated with a word of honor and the pledge of a handshake, but the word is later revoked and the promise is broken
- In past days, people realized that their reputation as honest businessmen and respectable Christians was more important than the money lost if they kept their word
- Nowadays it seems that Christians have lost their commitment to the truth, and the gospel witness is suffering for it

I. Abraham's Mixed Witness to Abimelech

vs. 22-24 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. ²³ Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

A. Abimelech's Spiritual Observation: God is With You

1. The Hand of Blessing Obvious

a. God's physical world, God's physical blessings

- b. earthly success
- c. also spiritual success
- 2. News of the Birth of Isaac?
 - perhaps the miracle baby himself was topic of conversation
- 3. Material Prosperity: droves of cattle, sheep, goats... many tents, much silver and gold
- 4. Visible Blessings
- 5. Greatest Blessing of All: “God is with you”... the visions of God, and his promises

B. Abimelech’s Painful Memory: You Lied to Me

vs. 23 *Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants.*

- 1. First met Abimelech: Genesis 20
- 2. Abraham lied concerning Sarah, his wife
- 3. God cursed Abimelech, his household, his nation
- 4. God violently threatened Abimelech in a dream... the root of Abimelech’s fear of God
- 5. Abimelech confronted Abraham
- 6. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, his household, and his nation
- 7. God answered Abraham’s prayer, blessed Abimelech
- 8. Abimelech blessed Abraham with lavish gifts, freedom to settle unmolested
- 9. Lingering problem: deceitfulness hard to overcome in a relationship
- 10. Phicol’s Presence: A Reminder of Abimelech’s military power
 - a. Phicol is an ominous presence... a tacit reminder that Abimelech and the Philistines have strength, and are not bargaining from an inferior position
 - b. HOWEVER: Phicol and all Abimelech’s army are no match for the power of God
 - c. Phicol remains silent

C. Abimelech’s Desire: A Covenant of Friendship

Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

1. Abimelech is concerned about treachery and attack
2. EVEN MORE: Abimelech wants to be blessed as was Abraham
3. Abimelech here reminds Abraham of the kindness he's shown him in letting him live there
4. Abimelech also reminds Abraham of his status as an alien and a stranger
 - a. in effect, he reminds him: "Don't forget that I was kind to you in letting you live here"
 - b. "You're a guest of mine"

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Acts 7:5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land

D. Abraham's Oath of Friendship

Abraham said, "I swear it."

1. The giving of the oath is to bring assurance to Abimelech
2. A Solemn ceremony of covenant oath-taking

Hebrews 6:16 the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

II. Abraham's Complaint to Abimelech

A. Although an Alien, Abraham Still Has a Grievance

Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.

This well Abraham had dug, and it was his by rights

When Abraham made the treaty with Abimelech, he testified to this very fact

"Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

B. A Serious Matter: Water is Life

Finding water in a desert is extremely difficult... since in this case, the water was subterranean

How deep the well was, we cannot know... but the labor involved was extensive

Big question is always where to invest the immense effort in digging the well... suppose you come up dry?

- Diviners using witchcraft or other superstitious techniques have long held pagan people captive to their methods of finding underground water
- Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, used a divining rod to try to find underground water
- Recently I was reading about a French scientist named Alain Gachet in the desert of Chad, who uses space age technology, especially an unprecedented set of topographical maps from the space shuttle which used a new form of radar that peers twenty yards underground. He entered the data into a hand-held Global Position Satellite device and finds the best places to dig for water. When he says "Dig here!", workers listen. So far, each of the half-dozen wells drilled under his direction has hit water. In general, hydrologists succeed anywhere from 65 percent to 80 percent of the time. Out here, in the nearly all-sand terrain of eastern Chad, that rate has been as low as 50 percent. This work has been literally life-giving in this region of Chad, because about 200,000 refugees have fled to Chad from Sudan's violent Darfur region. They each need four gallons of water a day, the United Nations says. In a land that gets no rain for months on end, Gachet could help save countless lives.

This quest for water in the desert is an ancient one

Illus. Nabatean desert water management

- About 300 years before Christ, an Arab tribe of merchants moved out of the deserts of Arabia into the ancient land of Edom. As the Nabataeans slowly expanded their realm, they became the masters of the Negev and the ancient Edomite homeland. Soon this area became known as Nabataea, and from this new base, the Nabataeans began acquiring wealth and building a merchant empire. Their camel caravans crossed Arabia and their ships plied the Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and even the Indian Ocean. Eventually Nabataean merchants and explorers would visit almost every known place on the globe.

The Nabataeans greatest accomplishment was probably their system of water management. They developed a system to collect rainwater using water channels, pipes, and underground cisterns. The Nabataeans were experts at collecting water and storing it in underground cisterns. All along their caravan routes, secret water collection systems collected water and stored it for later use. The ancient historian Diodorus noted: *"For in the waterless region, as it is called, they have dug wells at convenient intervals and have kept the knowledge of them from people of all other nations, and so they retreat in a body into this region out of danger. For since they themselves know about the places of hidden water and open them up, they have for their use drinking water in abundance."* (II.48.2) After

filling these reservoirs with rain water, they close the openings, making them even with the rest of the ground, and they leave signs that are known to themselves but are unrecognizable to others. They water their flocks every other day, so that, if they flee, or wander through waterless places, they may not need a continuous supply of water." (XIX.94.6-9)

In the Arabian desert, wars have been fought for centuries over the issue of wells... to take water from the well of a neighboring tribe could have resulted in a protracted and bloody war

C. Abimelech's Declaration of Ignorance

Abimelech wanted to cut this off, and declared his innocence by reason of ignorance

²⁶ But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

Abimelech knew what a serious matter it was for his men to have seized Abraham's well... and he feared the God of Abraham

III. The Treaty at Beersheba

vs. 27-32 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. ²⁸ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, ²⁹ and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" ³⁰ He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well." ³¹ So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there. ³² After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines.

A. The Matter Sealed with a Covenant

1. vs. 27 "Treaty" literally "covenant"
2. Same word used of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15
3. A binding agreement between two parties

B. Abraham's Return Gift

1. Large gift of livestock... the currency of the day
2. A return gift from Abimelech's earlier generosity
3. Well worth it for Abraham, to have peaceful relationships with his Philistine neighbors

C. The Seven-Fold Witness: This Well is Abraham's

1. The seven ewes were set off as a special sign
2. Ewes were especially valuable for their ability to have young
3. Every time Abimelech would look at these sheep and their offspring, he would be reminded of the covenant he had made with Abraham at Beersheba

D. The Future of Beersheba

1. The place was given a new name: “Beersheba”
2. Meaning slightly unclear: either “well of the seven” or “well of the oath”
3. Either way, a name commemorating the covenant of friendship between Abraham and Abimelech
4. The future of Beersheba:
 - Isaac would settle there and have the same squabble over the well as did his father Abraham (Genesis 26)
 - After the conquest under Joshua, Beersheba would signify the southernmost extremity of the Promised Land

Judges 20:1 Then all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead came out as one man and assembled before the LORD in Mizpah.

1 Samuel 3:20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD.

E. The Significance of the Tamarisk Trees

Genesis 21:32-34 *After the treaty had been made at **Beersheba**, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in **Beersheba**, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.*

An oasis of rest in a pilgrim existence

Trees are lasting signs of permanence

Tamarisk trees are ideal for providing shade in desert regions, since their leaves are small and narrow, with very little surface for water evaporation... hence tamarisk trees hardly ever lose their greenery and are refreshing for desert dwellers like Abraham

A sign of Abraham’s sense of rest... peace and security in this pilgrim life

A place where he could peacefully call on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God

There Abraham settled...

vs. 34 *And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.*

But the text reminds us that even here, he had not yet come into his eternal rest. He was still merely an invited guest, an alien and stranger just passing through

IV. The Future of Abimelech and the Philistines

A. Who Were the Philistines?

1. Originated from a place called *Caphtor*

Amos 9:7 "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the LORD. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"

2. Archaeology confirms that Caphtor was the island of Crete in the Mediterranean
3. Archaeology further suggests that the Philistines were originally Greek people who traveled along trade routes from their Kingdom in Mycenae in the Peloponnesus in Greece
4. Myceanae is the same culture that spawned the legends of the poet Homer... of King Agamemnon, of the beautiful Helen and the epic battles with Troy
5. Especially significant was the habit of Mycenaen warriors to challenge their adversaries to send out a champion to fight their champion to decide the battle
6. In Homer's Illiad, the Mycenaean champion Achilles fought the Trojan champion Hector in single hand to hand combat and defeated him... Achilles then dragged his body around the walls of Troy
7. This style of champion on champion fighting was suggested by the Philistine champion Goliath

1 Samuel 17:4-10 Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." ¹⁰ Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."

David took up the challenge and defeated the Philistine champion

This manner of fighting was distinctly Mycenaen... like Achilles and Hector!!

B. Philistines Well-known Enemies of Israel

1. Would have opposed Exodus with warfare if God had led Israel that way

2. Settled in coastline regions of southern Palestine, and were a constant thorn in Israel's side
4. Long history of warfare with the Philistines
 - a. dominant in every way... better organized than the Israelites, better military technology, better chariots and better iron implements
 - b. Samson was the first to stand up to them
 - c. Samuel also fought them successfully
 - d. King Saul led the battle after his anointing from Samuel
 - e. David also took up the struggle

BUT NONE OF THIS NEEDED TO HAVE OCCURRED!!!

B. Abimelech & Phicol: Philistines Blessed by Blessing Abraham

C. God Keeps His Promises... and His Warnings

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse...."

Clearly Abimelech believed this... this was why he sought a covenant of friendship with Abraham

God blessed both Abimelech and Phicol with extraordinarily long life...

They were still alive and in power when Isaac was married and his twin sons were twelve years old (Genesis 26)

If the Philistine descendants had followed that same approach, they also would have been blessed by God

D. Philistines Could Have Been Blessed, Instead they Were Cursed

1. Not included among the list of nations Israel was to destroy without mercy, the Philistines could have peacefully co-existed with Israel if they had chosen
2. Cursed to judgment

Jeremiah 47:1-4 This is the word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza: ² This is what the LORD says: "See how the waters are rising in the north; they will become an overflowing torrent. They will overflow the land and everything in it, the towns and those who live in them. The people will cry out; all who dwell in the land will wail ³ at the sound of the hoofs of galloping steeds, at the noise of enemy chariots and the rumble of their wheels. Fathers will not turn to help their children; their hands will hang limp. ⁴ For the day has come to destroy all the Philistines and to cut off all survivors who could help Tyre and Sidon. The LORD is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor.

V. The Eternal God

Genesis 21:33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.

God is an ETERNAL GOD... He is timeless, He never changes, He never grows old, never improves, never regresses

God is an ETERNAL GOD: not restricted or bound by time in any way

Humanity cannot see the next moment with any certainty at all... we are totally bound by the progression of events we know as time

We mark time by the passing of events... the rotation of the earth, sunrise and sunset; the waxing and waning of the moon; the cycles of seasons; the growth of our children from infancy through the toddler years to childhood to youth to adulthood to old age

As all of this progresses, time ever advances... but at no moment can any human being say for certain what the future holds

Abraham bowed down under his growing tamarisk tree and worshiped the eternal God

The unchanging, timelessness of God was Abraham's true home... for he was constantly being reminded of the fact that he was a guest in someone else's land:

vs. 34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Five hundred years later, one of Abraham's descendents, was like him, a wanderer without any earthly home

His name was Moses, and he spoke of the eternity of God and of finding a home in him... his meditation is called Psalm 90

Psalm 90:1-4 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

Abraham found no permanent resting place on earth... the tamarisk tree he planted has long since died

Moses found no permanent resting place on earth... he was buried on top of a mountain without ever reaching the Promised Land

Both of them found their resting place in the eternal God Himself... and if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, so will you. Everything else will disappear, but God is eternal.

VI. Applications

1. Living a life of integrity before a watching world

Jesus is the truth

*John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the **truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

The gospel is the word of truth

Christians are called to love and live the truth

Consistency is the key to the witness we present to the watching world

*2 Corinthians 4:2 We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the **truth** plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

Abraham's lie concerning Sarah hurt his ability to testify to the Eternal God he worshiped

Make sure that you speak the truth at work, in your neighborhoods, before your watching children

*Colossians 4:5-6 Be wise in the way you act toward **outsiders**; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

2. The lingering poison of lies

Lies poison a relationship

For this very reason it was hard for Abimelech to trust Abraham

Once trust is lost, it takes a long time to get it back

Cherish the truth in your relationships with each other... wives, don't lie to your husbands; husbands, don't lie to your wives; children, don't develop the habit of lying to each other or to your parents...

Lies devastate trust, and trust is the foundation of relationships

YET... even though we have lied, grace can overcome lies in a relationship... Abimelech was willing to believe the promise Abraham was making in the covenant they agreed to

3. Dealing with conflict... even with outsiders

Hebrews 12:14 *Make every effort to **live in peace** with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

Life is full of conflicts... it is impossible for sinners to live in close contact with each other without some conflict

Abraham and Abimelech show the way to resolving conflict peacefully.

Phicol could have been there with the Philistine army; Abraham could have rallied his victorious troops that already defeated the Chedorlaomer and the other Kings in Genesis 14; instead, they resolved to live in peace with each other

Human treaties are only as good as the character of the people that sign them... Hitler signed the Munich peace accord, promising to

4. Water in the desert: Jesus, the "Spring of Living Water"

This story hinges on the incredible value of the well in Beersheba... for without water in the desert, Abraham and his household would have soon died

Jesus had an encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well 2000 years later... and used the well to teach her about Himself

John 4:10-14 *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the **water** I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the **water** I give him will become in him a **spring of water** welling up to eternal life."*

Jesus came to satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts

He came to be the focus of our entire lives

AS THE DEER PANTS FOR STREAMS OF WATER...

ETERNITY

What does that word mean to you?

Some people think of it as an infinite succession of days

H.G. Wells in his outline of the history of the world spoke of eternity as like a mountain

Once a day a bird flew from the distant horizon and picked up a pebble and flew it to the ocean and dropped it in

When that mountain was totally removed, one day of eternity had passed

In our text, Abraham calls on “The Lord, the everlasting God”

YAHWEH EL OLAM... the Lord, the God of Eternity

Our text also speaks of the covenant that Abraham made with Abimelech. And testified to it with seven lambs

One of the things Scripture says God did in eternity was make a covenant in the blood of His Son... the blood of an eternal covenant

Hebrews 13:20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal **covenant** brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

In that covenant, we find God’s faithful promise to save anyone who trusts in Christ