

## **TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT**

### **Talk Genesis 21:22-34: Abraham and Abimelech Make a Covenant**

---

#### **Lesson 46**

*22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do. 23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt."*

*24 And Abraham said, "I will swear."*

*25 Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today." 27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. 28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.*

*29 Then Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?"*

*30 And he said, "You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well." 31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath there.*

*32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.*

#### **Background Notes**

In Genesis 20, we read that Abraham had migrated into the land area controlled by Abimelech. Abimelech was one of the early Philistine kings in the land of Canaan. When he moved to this area, Abraham had lied to Abimelech about his wife in order to protect his own life, saying that Sarah was his sister. As a result, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but God overruled and protected Sarah.

In Genesis 21, Abraham had moved to the area that would become known even to this day as Beersheba. We see that Abimelech was no small king, as his control and influence reached all the way to the Beersheba area. Look once again at verse 34: "*And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.*"

The fact that Abimelech wanted to make a covenant with Abraham shows that Abraham had increased in wealth and power. Abimelech brought Phichol, the general of his army, along with him to this summit meeting. Abraham was not just some small time Bedouin shepherd who had wandered into the area! No, he had become quite wealthy and powerful. Do you recall, back in Genesis 14, that Abraham was able to defeat the kings of the east with his small, but well-trained, army?

So Abraham has become a major force in the area, and Abimelech wanted to ensure peaceful co-existence for the future by making a treaty. Abraham agreed, and in accordance with the customs of that day, they "cut a covenant" (see the Talk transcript on Genesis 15 for a description of the cutting covenant made by God with Abraham). The sheep and oxen given by Abraham (v27) were cut in two and the covenant was ratified. The extra seven ewe lambs given to Abimelech by Abraham were to emphasize that the treaty included Abraham's exclusive right to the well that he had dug at Beersheba. *"And he said, 'You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well'"* (v30).

There is an ancient well near the archaeological site of ancient Beersheba that can be visited today. It's called "Abraham's Well," and it may be the very well mentioned in Genesis 21. In Hebrew, Beersheba means, "well of the oath," or "well of the seven" (after the seven ewe lambs). We can't be sure of the exact meaning, but Beersheba became well known in biblical history. In fact, the land of Israel is still referred to as the land "from Dan to Beersheba"!

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. Believers should try to live peaceably with unbelievers.**

The Bible teaches that we should work at living in peace with fellow believers. The Bible also teaches that we should work at living at peace with unbelievers! Romans 12:18 says: *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* And Hebrews 12:14 says: *"Pursue peace with all people."* So believers should try to live peaceably with unbelievers.

We have a great illustration and example of this truth here in Genesis 21. Abraham the believer and Abimelech the unbeliever make a peace treaty. Rather than fight over this well that Abimelech servants had seized, Abraham made it part of this peace treaty. Notice that the treaty was not just for the immediate present time, but for a long-lasting peace (v23). The offspring and posterity are considered. So there was a real effort here to live at peace with one another.

We should do the same. Believers should try to live peaceably with unbelievers. We should try to live at peace with our unbelieving neighbors, and our unbelieving colleagues at work, and our unbelieving student friends on the college campus. Even though they are unbelievers and usually don't want to hear the gospel from us, we should try to live peacefully with them.

When our two sons were preteens, they built a skateboard ramp in our back yard. The neighbors on one side of us did not appreciate the noise that was generated as the skateboards went up and down on the ramp. So we worked out a peace treaty! The ramp was open only during certain hours of the day. During the evening hours when the neighbors were sitting out in their backyard, there was no skateboarding. The treaty worked, and our neighbors appreciated us for this. Now maybe I should add that our neighbors had an older relative who lived with them. He was quite disappointed that the skateboarding hours were curtailed. He was hard of hearing so the noise didn't bother him -- and he enjoyed watching our boys skateboard. Now his entertainment was cut in half! Well, I think you see the point of the illustration. Whether it be unbelieving neighbors, or

unbelieving colleagues, or unbelieving friends -- as believers we should try to live peaceably with them. Sometimes it is very difficult, but believers should try to live peaceably with unbelievers.

## **2. Believers should not jettison justice for the sake of peace.**

In establishing the peace treaty, Abraham didn't just toss justice aside. Abimelech's servants had wrongly seized the well that belonged to Abraham. That was wrong, and the wrong had to be made right. Fortunately, when Abimelech heard about the theft of the well, he agreed that justice must be served. Abraham's well was given back to him in the treaty. So in living peaceably with our unbelieving neighbors, or unbelieving colleagues at work, or unbelieving friends, we are not asked to sweep sin under the rug, or pretend that nothing happened if some injustice has taken place. Believers should not jettison justice for the sake of peace.

We can always give up our **rights** in the interest of peace, but we should not jettison **justice**, or throw justice away, in the interest of peace with unbelievers. Let me illustrate this point with another neighbor story -- different neighbors this time. We had a set of nice sounding wind chimes that someone had given us. We didn't realize that the sound of the wind chimes bothered our neighbors. However, when our neighbors told us about it, what do you think we did? We took the wind chimes down. We didn't **have** to do it. They weren't that loud. It was our right to have wind chimes on our own deck. But in the interest of peace we gave up that right and took down the wind chimes. But notice that this was not a situation where justice was jettisoned for the sake of peace.

Now compare that to, let's say, a situation where your neighbor moves the property line three feet in his favor in the middle of the night. Now a crime has been committed. That's wrong! As a believer, you are not called on to ignore injustice in the interest of peace. In fact, it would be wrong not to bring this crime to light, not to have justice served. You don't have to let the unbeliever get away with sin. Believers should not jettison justice for the sake of peace.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Do your non-Christian friends have to say, "Don't deal falsely with me?"**

It was obvious to Abimelech that God was blessing Abraham. Abimelech said to Abraham, *"God is with you in all that you do"*(v22). Then why did Abimelech go on to say, *"swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me"*(v23)?

Why did Abimelech have to say that? Probably because Abraham had "dealt falsely" with Abimelech in the past, when he lied to Abimelech about Sarah his wife (chapter 20). What a sad testimony! On the one hand, it could not be denied that God was with Abraham, but on the other hand, Abimelech had to say "Don't deal falsely with me."

Do your non-Christian friends have to say "Don't deal falsely with me?" Or do you have a consistent testimony? How sad it is when our non-Christian friends, neighbors and colleagues know, on the one hand, that we are Christians, but on the other hand, they still have to worry that we won't be completely honest with them! Do your non-Christian friends have to say, "Don't deal falsely with me?"

## **2. Do you know God as El-Olam (the God of Eternity)?**

Let's take another look at verse 33: "*Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.*" (or, "the God of eternity").

As you know, there are a number of names by which God reveals Himself in the Bible. In this context, El-Olam, or "God of eternity," emphasizes the immutability of God. It emphasizes that God does not change as everything else changes. People change, time changes, and situations change, but God doesn't change. There is continuity and stability associated with God who is "El-Olam."

This is the name for God that is used in Isaiah 40:28-31: "*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, He neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. 31 But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*"

Do you know God as El-Olam -- the unchanging, everlasting God of Eternity?