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## Genesis

### Chapter 21 - God's Peace thru Problems

#### The Guarantee in Hostile Places (vs.22-34)

**Genesis 21:22-34:** 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; 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.” Abraham said, “I swear it.” But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. 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.” Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. 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.” Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. 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. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

We come to verse 22, and it really sets the stage for everything. You read a first phrase about something, and the tendency is to think that, well, it's kind of innocuous and perhaps not even significant in the scheme of things. But it is oftentimes the very first words that begin to set the stage for everything.

If you look with me in verse 22, it reads this way, (Genesis 21:22) “Now it came about at that time...”

Just words, right? Letting us know that there's perhaps some events that are taking place. And something's going on at a particular time and space. What we have really, throughout this particular event, are a list of things and I would say a contiguous sequence of events that take place that connect everything. And so, what you have is a connection of events that begin to take place. And it's those connections of events that then tell the story of why things are happening the way they happen. We would tend to read certain things and say, "Well, that's a coincidence, or maybe a serendipitous moment that occurred in which something good happened, but it just happened." And Scripture is wanting us to know that a sovereign God is acting unilaterally in all these things, and He is literally orchestrating that which He has purposed. And if you are confused about what the purpose of God is, all you have to do is go back to Genesis 12, and His purpose is very clear to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you a blessing." Let's just summarize it, right? And so, this is God's desire and design.

Strangely enough, in the midst of this, Abraham has in many cases, not been the blessing that God has called him to be. However, God has come back and actually bandaged up the things that he has done and made good out of it, as we will come to the end of the Book of Genesis, in which Joseph will ultimately say to his brothers, “You meant this for evil; God is going to turn this out for good.” And really, the Book of Genesis ends that way. It reveals to us, of course, the redemptive plan and the reconciliation of God throughout this wonderful Book of Genesis and how God is orchestrating these things in the midst of our rebellious acts and our sin. And even when we have somebody like an Abraham who desires to do the right thing, we oftentimes try to do those right things in our own power and our own strength and with our own wisdom. And so, then we just look behind us and all we see is carnage. We go, “Well, I was trying to do something good,” right? The “road to hell is paved with good intentions.” And so, the good intentions that Abraham begins to demonstrate; one is to protect his family. Of course, he goes down to Egypt. To protect his family, he throws his wife under the bus and declares her

as a sister, not only in Egypt, but now in the realm of the Philistines with Abimelech. To be the good guy and to try to make things work, he has relations with Hagar, and they have a son by the name of Ishmael, and things begin to fall apart with that. It is a picture in this particular setting in which Abraham has been dealing with the problems that have ensued because of the decisions that he has made. And nevertheless, God is with him, and God is working on his behalf. And how wonderful it is to know that God literally can cause all things to work together for good, even the bad decisions that I make. And this is not to encourage you to make bad decisions, but it is to know that God is not limited. And God can turn these things. He sees our hearts. And at any point in time, we come to that wonderful text of 1 John and we confess our sins, the Bible says He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And I've oftentimes told people, you know, it's a new day. At that moment, it's a new day. And you can start anew, and God can begin to heal things and do things, and He can turn things into good as you give your life to Him today. And this is why we oftentimes make the phrase and use that

wonderful passage in Hebrews, which says, “Today if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart.” Because today is a day of change, and we continue to encourage you to make that decision today.

We come to this passage, and so, we realize that Abraham is beginning to deal with some of the problems that have faced him. Nevertheless, God is coming in and He's rescuing. And it is in that setting that we see Abraham has to let go of Ishmael. And it is in letting go, of course, I mean, just imagine a father having to let go of a son has now been with him 14, maybe 17 years. And you've grown attached. It's your son. And now, God's saying, “You need to let him go.” And Abraham's going, “Well, who's going to take care of him?” So, he gives him water, and he gives him food, and they send them on their way. And the thought is that “God, You're going to have to do this.” Well, this is, in a way, a stage of God bringing Abraham to the point of releasing all things into His hand. Because Scripture tells us we walk by faith, not by sight. And trusting God, wow, sometimes looks pretty scary when you think about it. And it means that you're

not in control. That means that you're no longer the one trying to figure out how things are going to work. Whether it's going down to Egypt or being a little deceitful or whatever, you're not trying to make things work. You're trusting God to do that. And so, he lets him go.

Well, as we read the passage, we know that God does see Ishmael. God does care for him as He cares for Abraham. And so, He reveals a well. It is in this that we have what's interesting, what I would perceive a kind of coincidence of events and of things that are not only happening, but places that we find ourselves. And I personally believe that there are portions of Scripture where God and His Spirit begin to move in our hearts to do one thing, and that's connect the dots. Now, this is not to say that God wants us to read in something that is contrary to what Scripture is. But if you have the heart of Christ, you'll see exactly what God is doing. And this is one of those interesting passages where the Spirit of God begins to connect the dots, and God purposely doesn't fill in everything so that you would dig. Once again, it goes back

to that Proverbs 2, that I've oftentimes mentioned, that if you'll search for it like a treasure, like gold, like silver, if you'll dig, if you'll search, if you'll cry out for it, then God will open your eyes to see these things. And a wonderful passage in which Hagar is very concerned with her son. They're in the desert, they've run out of water at this particular juncture, and she begins to weep; puts him at a bow shot distance, some perhaps 300 yards. And there he sits under a bush, hopefully to have some sort of reprieve. The thought is that there are no wells around, but it is at this juncture that the angel of the Lord says, "There's a well right next to you." And it's true that God has His saving power all around us. God surrounds us with songs of deliverance. As Romans so clearly puts it, don't say who will ascend into heaven or who will descend to Sheol? That's to bring God down. But the word is near, even at your heart. And if you'll profess, if you'll confess, Jesus is Lord... So, we realize that God's omnipresent. He knows where you are. Call upon the name of the Lord and what? You will be saved. So, the Lord puts us in those particular places. It's going to be a realization in Abraham's life, it's

going to be a realization in Ishmael's life, Hagar's life, that God is a God, an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Nevertheless, so what's interesting about this whole scenario is, nothing in the text reveals to us that Abraham has a clue about what's going on. Because Abraham has sent Ishmael on his way. He's made sure he had enough water, perhaps for however long, however much they can carry, but now it's run out. He doesn't know that. There are so many things that we don't know. I remember when my daughter got married, my son moves away, you know, you don't know what's going on in their lives anymore. In fact, when they were living with you, you didn't know everything that was going on in their lives. And you can't always be there, obviously. God begins to reveal to us that we have limitations. And I know it comes as a shock to most of us, but there are so many things that we don't control. In fact, you really come to the point as a parent and say, "I don't think I control anything." And that's the point where God begins to work.

As we come to this passage, the power of God's presence is made known. Only God can bring life, and He does. God

is the only One that can do reparations and relationships, and He does. So, all of this is demonstrating the power of God to do this. Then He turns to Abraham, and He says, "Okay, you want to get things back in order in your house? Okay, establish the order." And I have seen, you know, a lot of distress and stress in domestic situations. And I would say it just backs up to starting off with getting the house in order. Who did God ordain to be in charge and what does He want him to do in that? Go to Titus 1 if you're confused about it. Go to 1 Timothy 3, as it begins to establish order and it's order that God directs. If you fall out of the order of God, chaos is going to happen. Distress and stressful situations are going to happen in the domestic realm. There's no doubt about it. The thought is that we can change all this stuff around, and God goes, "No, you were made this way." And even if you think about the way that a man thinks and the way that a woman thinks, it's different. I don't care what they say, it's actually different. So, when you begin to mess with all these things, then you have all kinds of problems and difficulties. So, He tells him, and Abraham then becomes a source that directs, but he still listens to his wife. That's

interesting. The wife thinks, “Well, I'm no longer significant in the lives of my family if this is true.” And God says, “No, you're very significant. In fact, I'm going to use you to do this.” So, there's a building up and encouraging and a helpmate, and all these things begin to happen. And then God ultimately begins to direct us back to, “Okay, now what's the priority? What do you need to be doing?” And you know, you get so caught up in the affairs of everyday life that you forget why you're here. I'm here for God to bless so that I can be a blessing so that we can bring people to the Lord. This is why I'm here. Well, you start getting back on target; things start falling in place. And certainly, at this juncture, Abraham starts going back, and he realizes that his flesh fails. There are things that he can't do. And you know, when you come to that point, I know that there's an initial thought of, “Well, I can't do anything, so I guess I'll just sit here.” And God goes, “Well, that's probably safer.” But the wonderful thing is that God doesn't want us to do nothing. He wants us to work together with Him. But before you do that, you have to realize that He's the source of all power. And so, if you don't see Him as the strength of your life, when your flesh

and your heart fail, then you're going to find yourself once again trying to work things out in perhaps a deceptive way or perhaps in a way that is destructive. You've got to admit, "I can't do it."

Now, the next question is that "If I admit that, then what next?" And I would say, well, admitting that and then trusting God, as Proverbs so clearly puts it, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." I like the "all," don't you? "Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him. He's going to direct your path or make your path straight." Well, what that's saying is that God begins to work in your life. You're going, "Well, I don't know how that works." I don't either. But I do know that He's sovereign, and I do know it's no problem for Him. And I have seen Him do it. So, at the moment that I come before Him and I say, "Okay, we're going to do it Your way. I'm no longer going to be in the control seat. I'm going to watch You, and I'm going to listen to You, and I'm going to get in the Word and set things in order, and I'm going to make priorities this and I'm going to let You begin to move." It's going to surprise you, but He actually is

going to start moving. People are going to start coming to your door. Things are going to start opening up.

Somebody's going to call you. Something's going to happen. So, I would say at this stage, watch, because God's going to begin to work. Once again, I just want to emphasize that it's God's desire and design that you work together with Him.

There's a great passage in 2 Corinthians 6:1, as Paul says, "And we're working together with Him." Now, look, bottom line is He doesn't need us. He created the universe, the heavens, and He says this in Isaiah. He says, "I did that all by Myself." And I know some of us go, "Really? You don't need me for anything?" "No, not really." But the wonderful thing is that He brings us in on this. And this is really, when you think about it, about a relationship. I remember my kids, when they were little, and I'd be working on something, they'd be hanging over, looking at me, and I'd go, "You want to help?" You hand them a tool, and you know they're going to hit something with it, probably you. But you begin to create a relationship in accomplishing. I mean, quite frankly, at this

particular juncture, the father doesn't need the kid to help him. But it's not about that. It's about building the relationship. And God allows us to be a part of this. And this is the reason why He calls Abraham, because what we're seeing is a relationship being built with this man. And as Isaiah will say, "And Abraham was a friend of God." So, we have this wonderful friendship that begins to work. Where does it begin? It begins by saying, "I can't do anything." And then God goes, "Okay, now I can teach you."

That's one of the things that I appreciate about Diane. And I can tell you this, that when we've had people come in, oftentimes new believers, and obviously there needs to be time in which they mature in the faith and such as this, but they've not been indoctrinated by false doctrine. And so, it's so refreshing. You know, you have somebody come in and they go, "Well, I don't know, what to do." "Okay, let me show you." And you just show them Scriptures, "What does Scripture say?" "Okay." Then they just do that. They don't try to psych it out or try to figure out, "Well, these people do this or these people..." They

just do what it says. And I think at the stage in which you realize that you can't do anything, you come to that point and say, "Okay, what do You want me to do?" And God goes, "Watch, I'll show you." We're now in verse 22, the "Watch, I'll show you." Because what God does is He brings Abimelech back. Now, if you remember, the whole scene with Abimelech was not really good, in which Abraham was trying in some way to protect himself in this realm of the Philistines. And the thought is, "If I somehow disguise my wife as my sister, that he's not going to bother me." But of course, God reveals the whole picture to Abimelech, and you have this wonderful picture of God going, "But I'm here, and I see." And He reveals to Abimelech, "You don't touch that woman. If you do, you're a dead man." And this somehow spoke to Abimelech. So, he pulls everybody aside, and he goes, "We don't touch this woman, or we're all dead." He gives him cattle and sheep, and he goes, "God bless you. God bless you. Get out of here." But no, he actually keeps them in the particular realm. And so, Abraham begins to live in this realm. Well, something happens; the story isn't over. And the thought is that, "Well, we had that

encounter with Abimelech. Now, he's probably going his own way.” But God brought something to his mind. I don't know how He did it, but Abimelech's probably sitting there going, “I've got to make sure that this guy is not going to pull this one again because if he deceives me again, then God comes to me again, I am a dead man. And I'm not only concerned that it may happen in my lifetime, I'm concerned for my kids, because my kids are going to do the same thing that I would have done, and if they do, well, we got to get this straightened out.”

So, in verse 22 we pick up.

(Genesis 21:22) “Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol...”

Actually, probably pronounced, “pee-kole”. This particular guy, as it states within the text, is the commander of the army. But his name literally means “mouthpiece of the people”. So, he's kind of the spokesman of the people, representative of the people, and he's kind of speaking for the people.

So, it says in the passage that Abimelech and his mouthpiece of the people, “mouth of all is actually what the name means,”

“... the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do.””

“I mean, not only did God let us know that He's with you, but we've seen the success that God has given you, so obviously you're a guy that we don't want to mess with.”

The statement that goes on in the passage is, “Now therefore, we need you to promise to us by your God that you're not going to be deceptive anymore.”

The way it reads is,

(Genesis 21:23) “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.””

Now, at this juncture, Abraham doesn't go into a long dissertation at all. In fact, I would say to some degree it's probably a little embarrassing that he was called on the

carpet for being deceptive. But he doesn't go into trying to defend himself or anything. He just goes, "I swear. I promise."

And if you look at verse 24, that's it. Now, what's interesting is the word that he uses, "*šāba'*," and it's where we get the word "sabbath". So the word "sabbath" is making reference to "seven". And specifically, they are connected; that is to say to swear or to seven yourself, is the same thing as taking an oath. And so, as God gives us His promise in that 7th day, it is a promise that He's going to fulfill all that He said, even bringing the things to pass of the salvation, which we will ultimately see within the process of history. But God has made a commitment and is calling us, according to Hebrews, to enter into that sabbath rest of the promise of God. We enter into His promise, don't we? He promised that He was going to rescue us. He promised that He was going to defeat Satan, even to Adam and Eve. And so, there's a promise that He has made. This somehow has taken root in the thought of all mankind on the earth at this particular juncture, so they know what to seven yourself is, which

once again, the thought is, “Well, these are people that don't know God.” No, most of them probably still know some of Noah's sons. They're still living at this juncture. So, it's not like nobody knows what's going on. It's that they've rebelled and gone their own way, there's no doubt about that, but they know what it means to seven yourself. And so, they're saying, “Seven yourself,” and he goes, “I seven myself.”

But in the passage, everybody is wanting something more tangible. And we remember and recall in Genesis 15 where you have the incident in which God shows the covenant, and which covenant actually means “cutting,” and the cutting a part of animals and walking between the animals. And it's an interesting picture of, “If I break this promise, so shall it be to me as it is to these animals.” And so, you're making that covenant a promise within it. So, it says in verse 25, the swearing wasn't it, because Abraham has something else that he needs to put on the table. Now, what's interesting about this is, if you remember the first encounter with Abimelech, is that he's very trepidatious about coming before Abimelech, right?

Now, he's actually complaining to him, and in some texts it actually reads, rebuking him. So, Abimelech's going, "You promise that you're not going to lie to me." And Abraham's going, "Well, you promise that you're not going to pillage." So, he's now acting forcefully. What's interesting about the passages is that Abraham has become acutely aware of the presence of God and is no longer afraid. Now, let me say this, and I think it's one of the reasons why this text is even in Scripture; it's hard for us to know how to deal with the world that we live in. I mean, we're saints. We're to be separate. We're to be distinct. In fact, 2 Corinthians 6 reminds us that we don't have fellowship with darkness. I mean, it's not a part of our life. However, the Scripture also says, "Therefore, as it depends on you, be at peace with all men," there in Romans. So, how do I find this peace with all men and yet the distinction that God has called me to? And I think sometimes our perception is that, well, what we do is we basically cater to the whims of people because we want to look like a nice guy. We're Christians, right? So, as Christians, we want to look like the nice guy. And so, by catering to them, we begin to, in some way, I would say,

affirm their evil ventures and the things that they do. And it's almost like you put a stamp on it because, here again, I hate to get put on soap box with this, "But God gets you." And it's that whole concept of, "It's not a big deal." You know, sin is a big deal. If it wasn't a big deal, Jesus wouldn't have had to die. So, you know, it's wonderful that you can be forgiven. That's wonderful. It doesn't matter what your sin is, you can be forgiven. But it is a big deal that you sin. So, the thought oftentimes is that we try to acquiesce or we try to, in some way, cater to the whims of the world. And you walk away going, "At least I was a nice guy." But God's not telling you to be a nice guy in that sense. God's telling you to be holy and to be distinct. And that means that in this process, you're not afraid of man. And I think one of the reasons that we do the things that we do is because we're just afraid of how they're going to react, how they're going to respond. This is a very interesting passage in which Abraham is convinced that God is with him. Not only has he brought Abimelech to him, not only did he demonstrate to Abimelech, you want to be nice to this guy, a



nd it put literally Abimelech on his knees. And now, Abimelech has come and he goes, “Look, we want to be friends because we know how great your God is.” And we should speak with great boldness. We shouldn't be afraid of people. And we shouldn't seem to think in any way that by sweet-talking, we're going to bring them into salvation. You know, I don't soft-sell the gospel. “Oh, you mean I'm going to hell?” “Yeah.” “I don't think we ought to say that. It's going to offend people.” You should be more concerned about offending God than man.

So, Abraham comes, and he goes, “I've got a problem.

The text reads this way in verse 25,

(Genesis 21:25) “But Abraham complained to Abimelech...”

Actually, the Hebrew would be, “was up front with him in showing him an issue.” Actually, the word means to be up front.

“But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.”

“Seized.” That makes reference to by violence; they had taken that which Abraham had dug. By the way, it's going to happen again with his son, Isaac.

If you look with me in Genesis 26, just to kind of show you that he's not talking off the top of his head. It says, verse 12, of course, this is an interesting passage because it kind of mirrors the mistakes of Abraham, so Isaac does that in this passage. But nevertheless, God blesses him.

(Genesis 26:12) “Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him,

(Genesis 26:13) and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy;

(Genesis 26:14) for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.

(Genesis 26:15) Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth.”

Okay, so we do have a problem. And it's the same problem that was in the times of Abraham. And Abraham

goes, “You guys are stopping up our wells. I dug those wells.” “Oh, you don't want to say anything.” Well, it's wrong. And not only is it wrong, but it's hurting people. Because by the virtue of stopping up the wells, there are people that need the water in the desert, and they're starving of thirst. So, these people are hurting people out of spite. “I don't want to say anything. I'm a Christian.” Well, if you're a Christian, you need to say something.

(Genesis 21:25) “But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

(Genesis 21:26) 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.”

This guy's doing the “two-step.”

(Genesis 21:27) “Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.”

So, if you look at the passage, the two are making a covenant. One, basically Abraham is going, “I swear, no

more deception,” and Abimelech going, “Okay, I swear, no more plundering.” And a covenant is being made. Abraham offers sheep and oxen for this. Now, at this juncture, everything begins to change. So, they've made the covenant, they've made the promise, but Abraham's not done. And what we're seeing is a very interesting pattern in which God is really establishing in Scripture on how we deal with this particular world in which we live in. Once again, foundational, Romans 12:18, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. So, you know, somebody says, “I want to be at peace with you.” You go, “Yeah, me too. I don't want to fight.” A Christian shouldn't be belligerent or obnoxious or anything like that. But the second thing that we see within the passage is that you can't walk around being afraid of man. You can't do that.

The way that Psalm 118 reads,

(Psalm 118:6) “The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?”

And certainly, there was that feeling with Abraham, “The Lord is on my side. I can tell this guy that he's doing

something wrong.” And once again, you're not trying to be nasty, but saying, “Stop doing this.”

(Genesis 21:28) “Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.”

Abimelech goes, “This is new stuff. I haven't seen this before.”

The passage reads in verse 29,

(Genesis 21:29) “Abimelech said to Abraham, “What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?””

“This is not part of what we've done in the past. We know what covenant is; we just don't know what this is that you're doing.”

So, Abraham says this in verse 30,

(Genesis 21:30) “... “You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well.””

Okay, so I'm still a little confused. So, let's see if we can dissect this. 7 ewe lambs. Well, 7, once again, is the number of an oath. It's a promise. So, that's the picture

with the 7. Ewe lambs, have you ever seen those little lambs? When you look at them, they're just huggable. And they actually, from what I understand, even to this day, sell lamb pelts because it's the lamb pelt that is the softest. And can bring quite a bit of money for that. So, what you have are these female lambs, and it literally is a picture of softness. In fact, it's even beyond a picture of softness; it's a picture of endearment. We know this specifically because it is exactly what Nathan will use when convicting David of being treacherous. When he takes Bathsheba and when he kills Uriah, Nathan comes before him and he goes, "I've got a story to tell you." Guess what the story's about? 1 ewe lamb. And the picture specifically is given within the text.

Actually, when you read this in 2 Samuel 12:3 the passage reads that the lamb was like a daughter to him, the man who had the lamb. That's a pretty interesting picture, isn't it? Which is telling us that you have this picture of innocence; you have this picture of a cherished possession, physical endearment personified with this lamb. So, here's Abimelech, rough and gruff guys, and

he's going, "Let me give you these little lambs. You've got seven of them." I mean, it's no wonder that John the Baptist declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." What an interesting picture. So, what is Abraham wanting to do? He's wanting to conjure up feelings of what he values most. Now, what we know at this juncture is Abimelech values not only himself, but he values his progeny. He's concerned about his kids. There's a soft spot even in Abimelech's life. And in many respects, what Abraham is saying is that "I want to do this so that you would remember what is valuable to me. This is a witness of my value system." You would ask yourself, "Okay, what is he valuing?" The young, the innocent, those that are close and near and dear to his heart.

Now, here's where it gets very interesting. Remember, I was talking about connecting the dots? Of all places for Ishmael to be, he is in the land of Beersheba. Now, Scripture gives us the name of the place before it's actually named, or perhaps shortly after.

But the passage, if you look with me in verse 31,

(Genesis 21:31) “Therefore he called that place Beersheba...”

Now, Beersheba basically is just dealing with *be'er*, dealing with the well; “*šeba*” is an oath. “The well of an oath.” “This is where we made a promise, at the well of an oath.”

(Genesis 21:31) “Therefore he called that place Beersheba...”

“The well of the oath.”

“... because there the two of them took an oath.”

That makes sense, doesn't it? Here it's named.

But I want you to back up into Chapter 21. I want you to look with me in verse 14.

(Genesis 21:14) “So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.”

Huh. Same place.

Now, watch this,

(Genesis 21:15) “When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.”

That's interesting.

Now, watch as we continue to read in verse 32.

(Genesis 21:32) “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.”

(Genesis 21:33) Abraham planted a tamarisk tree...”

Do you know what that is? Actually, the Hebrew word is, “*ēšēl*”. That particular tree is actually a bush. It's a bush tree. And it's very hardy in the desert. But the bizarre thing is, and I don't know of all the details, I don't really even know how it works, but I know that it secretes salt that absorbs water. And it's very interesting; it creates a dew that acts like an air conditioning. Now, if you were to be concerned for your child, what bush would you leave your kid under? Now, what's interesting about all of this is, it doesn't let us know the exact time of what's happening. It just basically says, “at this time.” So, what we begin to see is that an oath was made around this

time with Abimelech. A well had been dug by Abraham. It would be by this well that they would make the oath, as Abraham would point out, "You don't want to mess with my wells, because I've reserved them for those that I cherish." Abraham not knowing that Ishmael is going to end up in Beersheba by the well of the oath and perhaps reap some benefit of the very bush that he had planted. Connecting dots? I don't think it's a coincidence. I don't think it's a coincidence that he's at this place in Beersheba. I don't think it's a coincidence in which he's making a commitment. I don't think it's a coincidence in which he says, "I just want to let you know what's really important to me. And that's the innocent. And that's the ones that are near and dear to my heart. And I don't want you to ever forget. This is a witness." And by virtue of him giving those 7 ewe lambs to him and Abimelech receiving them, what Abimelech is doing by receiving them is he's affirming the commitment. In other words, by the very act of the receptivity of those ewe lambs, he's going, "I understand what you're saying, and I concur with what you're saying." And now, the two are joined together with this thought.

Many years later, the message of the gospel will come, and God will say in John 1, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become children of God." In other words, at the moment that you receive the gift that God gives, that gift of that which is most valuable to Him, you enter into a peace pact. Scripture says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And you find yourself in a relationship simply by receiving that wonderful gift. God gives us opportunities and they're all around us. We don't know what to do as God calls us. The thought is sometimes that maybe we have to placate the world, but God says, "Look, you do the right thing. You stand up for what is right. I'll bring them to you." Don't humble yourself before man. Humble yourself into the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you. And once again, our goal is not to hurt or destroy or be obnoxious, but it is to save. And what's interesting about this text is that as God calls us, He calls us to give a blessing instead, right? So, they had taken the wells; you give a blessing instead.

We've got to end with this passage, if you'll turn with me to 1 Peter 3. We'll just end with this text. 1 Peter 3. Just by way of reminder of getting back to the basics, getting back to what God has called us to; we read this passage so many times, but it's interesting to see it from different perspectives.

(1 Peter 3:8) “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

(1 Peter 3:9) not returning evil for evil...”

Now, once again, this doesn't mean that God is wanting you to affirm evil. In other words, God is wanting you to be gracious, but not to cater to man's evil endeavors. God's wanting you to bestow a blessing in spite of their evil endeavors. And oftentimes, when somebody does something wrong to us, you know what that is? That's an opportunity to tell people, “Look, let me tell you what's important to me. Let me tell you what's most valuable to me.” Because at that juncture, they're listening.

The passage reads,

“not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose...”

I love the way that ends,

“... that you might inherit a blessing.”

Who would have thought that by giving those 7 ewe lambs that you would inherit the blessing? And who would have thought that by making this peace pact, by sharing with Abimelech what is most dear to him, that perhaps his own son, Ishmael, would be saved at this very spot and be cared for? Who would have thought that? God works on our behalf, and He says, “You just do what I say. You do it with the heart as unto Me, and you care for those people. Don't give in and tell them what they want to hear. You tell them what is valuable. And in telling them what is valuable, you're giving them a blessing instead.”

Scripture goes on and says this in verse 10,

(1 Peter 3:10) “For, “THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,

MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.”

“Abraham, quit lying, quit deceiving. Speak the truth in love.”

(1 Peter 3:11) “HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.”

You know, there's no greater way to seek peace than to introduce the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

(1 Peter 3:12) “FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.””

We have God on our side. We don't need to be afraid. We do need to make use of the opportunities that God has given us.

I love the way the text ends because Abraham comes before God and he goes, “You're the everlasting God.” And you say, “Well, why would *Yehovah Olam*... why in

the world would you declare Him the everlasting God in this particular passage?" Because Abraham is saying, "Even when I die, You can make sure this is done." Isn't that wonderful to know that?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Father, we come before You today and we give You thanks for Your working in our lives. You're opening doors of opportunities all around us. And Lord, we come to You with simplicity and say, "We don't know what we're doing." And You and Your grace just simply turn to us and say, "Watch." You bring people into our paths and oftentimes it's an adversarial moment. And yet, You give us an opportunity to demonstrate what's really valuable to us. We don't excuse the wrong behavior, but we focus on the grace of God. And so, Lord, teach us to be like You. Mold us into those that walk by faith.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. I'm just asking you to talk to God; to use those times in your life for benefit. God's actually called you to be a blessing, but in so doing, you're going to find yourself inheriting blessings

that you never realized that you would have. God's going to reveal to you so many marvelous things as you go around sharing those wonderful, valuable truths.