

The promise of 'the land'

• Yet to be fulfilled

• The land occupied by Philistines who had seized Abraham's wells

• Sudden change – Abimelech requests a covenant relationship

• Abrahams complaint resolved

• Gifts

• Oaths

• 'Beersheba'

1. God gives us encouragements as we are moving in the direction of inheriting the promises

• We should

The promise concerning 'the seed' has taken a major step forward, but now there is another matter, the promise of the land. There were 'Philistines' in Israel at this time. They were not those known from later days, but were apparently an earlier group that had come from the Mediterranean area. At one stage Abraham had dug wells in an area which Abimelech the Philistine ruler regarded as his. Abraham was taking some steps towards occupying the land God had promised him. But then Abimelech's servants had seized the wells. At that time they regarded him as an alien from Haran who had no right to claim the use of any land, not even water wells! It was all very discouraging.

But suddenly there is a change. At the celebration of the weaning of Isaac, Abimelech the Philistine leader and Phicol the commander of his army were present as visitors and approached Abraham with a request ^{□1}. They were so impressed with the obvious success of Abraham ^{□2} that they wanted to enter into a covenant-relationship with him. They ask Abraham to swear an oath. It seems to be a two-way covenant, because both men are involved in oath-taking ^{□3}. Abraham swears not to 'deal falsely' with them; loyalty is an essential part of covenant-relationship. They want him to 'show kindness'; kindness and favour is also part of a covenant-relationship ^{□4}.

Abraham joins in the oath as they wish ^{□1}, but he has a complaint. If the two men are to be in covenant together, he has a request. Abimelech's servants have taken a well that he dug. Abimelech is apologetic, declares his innocence, and is ready to settle the dispute ^{□2}.

So the covenant is made. Abraham gives gifts to Abimelech ^{□1} but he gives seven more sheep than Abimelech expects ^{□2}. They are a special gift to go with the special request that Abraham's well should be recognized as his ^{□3}. The request is accepted ^{□4}, and the men swear a two-way oath there, or we could say they swear two oaths. So well-known was the event in later years, the place became known as 'Beer-Sheba' – the 'Well of the Oath'. Then the two visitors went home ^{□5}. Abraham plants a tree which will in later years give plenty of shade and by the tree builds an altar. Beersheba will be a sacred spot with a place of prayer and of sacrifice built by Abraham ^{□6}. He stayed in that part of the land for a long time ^{□7}.

1. God gives us encouragements as we are moving in the direction of inheriting the promises. The main point of this little story is to show us that Abraham is making some steps towards getting the promises of God fulfilled. He had been promised a seed, and Isaac has been born. He had been promised land, and now some leading men of the land of Canaan recognize that Abraham has had a certain amount of success in the land of Canaan. They talk about 'the country where you are living as an alien'. They know that Abraham does not really belong in Canaan. He comes from Haran, and he does not have Canaanite ways. Yet they recognize that Abraham is being blessed by his God. And so they want a good relationship with him. So they accept his residence in the land and they leave him with the use of the water-wells. It is not much but it is a step towards inheriting the promises.

All of this means that we ought to take notice when small things

□1 21:22a

□2 21:22b

□3 see 21:31

□4 21:23

□1 21:24

□2 21:25–26

□1 21:27

□2 21:28

□3 21:29–30

□4 21:31

□5 21:32

□6 21:33

□7 21:34

take notice of small things that happen...

2. The event which gave Abraham encouragement leads him into a new grasp of the character of God


• *El-Olam – the everlasting God whose promises extend into the vast future ahead of Abraham*

• *We need to be awake to the encouraging hints of God*

happen to us that take a step towards inheriting what we know to be God’s will for our lives. God is still alive. He still gives us intimations of His will. He still gives us encouragements along the way.

2. **The event which gave Abraham encouragement leads him into a new grasp of the character of God.** He now uses a new name for God, ‘El Olam’, the ‘Everlasting God’. There are five compound-names for God in the book of Genesis with the word *El* in them, *El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Olam, El Ro ’i, El Bethel*. Each of these names arose in the context of some event which gave the person concerned a fresh glimpse of God. Here Abraham thinks of the distant future. Will the land that he has been promised ever belong to him? Perhaps not because he is now getting elderly. It seems that he is only getting a few small privileges such as the use of the water-wells he had dug. But that is not much. But – he thinks to himself– God is the ‘Everlasting God’. When Abraham has left this world, God will still be there. The promise to him has spoken of a vast nation and of many kings coming from his ‘seed’. This must mean that the promise extends out into the vast future ahead of him and ahead of his lifetime. Will Canaan ever belong to his seed? Yes! God is El Olam – the everlasting God. His plans come about slowly, but God is over and above the ages of time. He looks back and He looks ahead with perfect knowledge of what His plans are and what He is going to do.

It was some such thinking along these lines that led Abraham into a deeper knowledge of God. One little encouragement from God – a couple of neighbouring commanders turning up at a feast for his son – and Abraham is led to rejoice and know that God is the Everlasting God. Such small events in our lives can bring us such great encouragement, if we are awake to the hints of God.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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