

FAIR WATER FRIENDS

GENESIS 21:22-34 MARCH 9, 2022

Jeff Bezos turned heads last November when he spent \$78 million on a 14 acre estate in Maui.¹ Locals are nervous about his presence. One said, "It's hard to know what Bezos' intentions are this early on," whether he will be a benefit or a burden on the surrounding community.

14 acres is pretty measly compared to Mark Zuckerberg's footprint on Kauai. He recently bought another 600 acres there, bringing his total acreage on the Island to 1,300.²

But billionaire Larry Ellison (co-founder of Oracle) has them both beat for bragging rights. Since 2012 he has owned 98% of Lanai, the Hawaiian island west of Maui - 87,000 acres.³ His goal is to transform it into a "utopia." His wealth and Hawaiian project has led to Ellison "advis[ing] many [US] presidents...over the past 39 years on the strategic direction of our country."⁴

It sounds a little like our text tonight. Abimelech, the Philistine king, shows up at Abraham's front door for a meeting. He wants to work out an arrangement with this pilgrim. But it's not just the flocks and herds and household operation that Abimelech has noticed. Something much more significant caught his eye - the presence of God in the life of this strange old man.

If you are a Christian, you have been scattered where and when you are by God on purpose. He places us so that we can shine like lights in the dark. Have you been to that "Field of Light" place in Paso Robles? Christians are God's light show, bringing truth and beauty to a world in the dark. As we live, we're to do so peaceably and quietly, not being dependent on others Paul says.⁵ But, while living quiet lives, God plans to use you to show the unbelievers around you how glorious He is.

The problem is that it's very easy for us to be distracted or deflected off that mission. These stories in the Bible are given to us as trail markers to guide us in our life of faith. As we walk with the Lord, not only is He able to bless us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, but our lives light up, shining brighter and brighter, drawing the attention of nonbelievers around us.

Abraham's meeting with Abimelech and their conflict resolution gives us a great example to apply to our own day-to-day living as people whose desire is to glorify God and draw others to Him.

Genesis 21:22 - ²²At that time Abimelech, accompanied by Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do."

¹ <https://nypost.com/2021/11/04/as-jeff-bezos-buys-up-maui-hawaiian-locals-hope-for-best/>

² <https://www.businessinsider.com/mark-zuckerberg-bought-more-land-kauai-hawaii-2021-5>

³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/oracle-larry-ellison-lanai-hawaii-plans-sustainability-tourism-2020-12>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/angelauyeung/2020/04/01/exclusive-larry-ellison-reveals-his-big-data-battle-plan-to-fight-coronavirus-in-partnership-with-trump-white-house/?sh=412200d331d3>

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:11

A lot was going on in Abraham’s life. Hagar and Ishmael had just been expelled from the house. He had a new baby at home. There were constant and continual needs of the many flocks and herds.

God wants to use you, whether you’re terribly busy or terribly unoccupied. *How* He wants to use you is His business, ours is to be willing to serve in whatever capacity He desires. This opportunity wasn’t Abraham’s idea. It just dropped in his lap, but he was ready to be God’s man in the room.

Abimelech represents the unbelievers you cross paths with in daily life. He’s fascinating to watch because he’s so many different things at once. He’s a little slippery in the way he acts, but he’s also courteous and respectful. He wants to hold the upper hand in his dealings with Abraham, but he also wants to be at peace with him. He’s interested in this relationship Abraham has with God, but he also wants to intimidate Abraham as they talk. This is not *just* a friendly pop-in. You don’t bring the commander of your army if you’re just “in the neighborhood” and hoping for a cup of tea.

What Abimelech says is significant: “God is with you in everything you do.” Abimelech had been watching. He kept tabs on what was going on in Abraham’s life and the conclusion he came to was, “Something is different. There is a spiritual vitality that can only be explained by the supernatural presence of God.” Now, Abraham wasn’t a miracle worker. Abraham’s life wasn’t free from problems. And it wasn’t as if Abraham was the only wealthy herdsman in the area. But this man’s life was like a light in the dark because a real and holy God was present with Him.

In our dispensation, the power of God is not known through flocks or herds or conquering land, but through the good works God has called us to join Him in. His power and presence are known through the way we love others. They’re known through the way we avoid sin. They’re known through our unity with fellow Christians and through our suffering with Christ and through His working in our weakness.⁶ Faithful Christian living produces an effective Christian witness.

Though delivered by the lips of a pagan, what a beautiful reminder it is that God is with us in everything we do. He is never too tired, never held back late at the office, never checked out, never disinterested. He not only cares about every aspect of your life, but He wants to support and infuse every aspect of His life with His grace and peace and power and joy.

Genesis 21:23 - ²³Swear to me by God here and now, that you will not break an agreement with me or with my children and descendants. As I have been loyal to you, so you will be loyal to me and to the country where you are a resident alien.”

Abimelech turns up the pressure. He demands that Abraham sign on the dotted line “here and now,” and he adds the subtle detail that, “You’re a resident alien, after all, living here because *I let you.*” It was a reminder to Abraham that, as far as Abimelech was concerned, Abraham had no claim to rights or property in that region.

⁶ Matthew 5:16 1 John 3:18 1 Peter 4:4 2 Corinthians 13:11 Philippians 3:10 2 Corinthians 12:8

But what was *actually* true? The truth was *all* of this land belonged to Abraham because *God* said so. You and I may be trod upon by the world, but this is the greater truth: Because we are in Christ, we will one day rule and reign with the true King of all the world.

Notice that Abimelech did not ask Abraham to come to his temple or appeal to *his* gods. He knew they didn't answer calls. It's important that we show the world that our God really speaks, really hears, and really moves. It's not that we make things up, but our God really is different from any other because He is real and all the rest come from the imagination of man. Isaiah 45 talks again and again about how the Lord is God and there is no other - that He proves Himself. That He is a Savior. That He establishes. That He strengthens and directs and calls us by name.

Sadly, in some territories of Christianity, it's fashionable to suggest God's truth can't really be known, or that the best He can do is leave us broken. If that is Who God is, why would unbelievers come to Him?

Abimelech asks Abraham to show him "hesed." It means to deal gently and kindly. One commentator defines it this way: "A voluntary commitment by a stronger party to meet the needs of a weaker party."⁷ This is what God has done to us and now sends us to go and do likewise.

Genesis 21:24 - ²⁴And Abraham said, "I swear it."

When King Jesus came to Abraham's tent, we saw Abraham get all worked up. He was hustling around, making sure everything was just right. It's interesting to see how peaceful he is in this scene, when a powerful heathen king shows up with his general and starts talking about how he's worried they might have conflict in the future and that, after all, Abraham has no real right to be there anyway. But Abraham isn't shaking in his sandals. He's not wringing his hands. He's at peace because he knows that his stability and security come from the Lord, not some Philistine.

He also shows us that it's ok for us to have dealings with nonbelievers. He enters into a binding agreement with them. Now, he doesn't compromise in order to do so, but there wasn't anything wrong with this covenant they were making. It was a good thing to have a peace accord. As Christians, we're commanded to be peacemakers. James says that we are to cultivate peace.⁸

Genesis 21:25 - ²⁵But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well that Abimelech's servants had seized.

Ah, now that they were covenanted together, there was a problem. You see, some of Abimelech's servants had come and violently seized a well that Abraham dug some time before. Now, this is interesting. Because, up till this point, Abraham had been willing to graciously accept that offense and not make an issue of it. He didn't bring a case to Abimelech's palace. He didn't organize a counter-strike against these thieves. He was gracious and willing to be wronged.

⁷ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁸ James 3:18

But *now* they're in this hesed relationship of loyalty and kindness. And so, this issue needed to be dealt with. Because the whole agreement is about how these people were going to treat each other, so Abraham has to say, "By the way, *you* are already in violation of this contract."

Now, Abraham did *not* try to solve this problem in a vengeful way. He didn't demand the servants be drawn and quartered. Where it says he "complained" there (or your version may say "rebuked") can mean to "determine what is right."⁹ Derek Kidner shares that the verb suggests that Abraham had to bring this issue up several times.¹⁰ It seems Abimelech really wasn't wanting to deal with this at first. But this needed to be dealt with. Not because Abraham was unwilling to be wronged, but because it was now a barrier in his relationship with Abimelech.

So, sometimes God asks us to be wronged and not retaliate or even bring it up. But, sometimes we're going to have to graciously engage in conflict resolution. When we're standing up for something, it should be for justice and for peace, not just an easier experience for ourselves.

Genesis 21:26 - 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."

Effectively, Abimelech blames Abraham. Did he know about this well issue? Maybe, maybe not. But, true to human form, he didn't want to take responsibility.

When we're preaching the Gospel, people have to be told that they're in the wrong. They're guilty of sin before God. But that guilt shouldn't make us *hate* them. The whole point is that we want them to be brought into fellowship with our Savior and with us. But, for that to happen, they will have to take responsibility and own up to their sin and be willing to come to the table to make peace.

Genesis 21:27 - ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

They cut a covenant, much like God had with Abraham in chapter 15. Even though Abimelech was the one that came wanting a deal, Abraham was willing to finance the peace. So, throughout, we see him carrying himself with grace and patience and a willingness to do what needs doing so people could live together harmoniously.

Genesis 21:28-30 - ²⁸ Abraham separated seven ewe lambs from the flock. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why have you separated these seven ewe lambs?" ³⁰ He replied, "You are to accept the seven ewe lambs from me so that this act will serve as my witness that I dug this well."

⁹ Waltke

¹⁰ Derek Kidner *Genesis*

Abraham added a clause of his own to the contract and he had to explain his methods to Abimelech. God has ways of doing business. He has means and methods that He wants us to use in our work and our relationships. They won't always make sense to unbelievers.

This covenant, like others, had to be sealed in blood. We're reminded that we were once pagan Philistine thieves, who carried on in ignorance and iniquity. But a Lamb was slain so that we could have peace with God, if we're willing to agree to His terms of covenant.

Abraham's addition to this agreement highlights the fact that *he* dug the well in question. The Bible isn't against the idea of personal property. There are some who suggest that since Jesus told the rich young ruler that he should sell all his belongings, therefore Jesus doesn't want you to own anything. That's not consistent interpretation. Jesus *might* want you to sell all you have. But, until He directs you to do that, the Bible isn't anti-personal property. God loves to give us things that we can then use to serve Him and glorify Him and bless others. Someone owned a fully furnished upper room that Jesus got to have His last supper in. Someone owned the donkey our Lord would borrow to ride into Jerusalem. Lydia, the seller of purple, was able to use her home for the furtherance of the Gospel. Abraham's wells were used to slake the thirst of many weary creatures.

Even then, the New Testament does not teach that your belongings are *only* given to you to be used for others. Paul owned a cloak that he wanted for himself. Peter told Ananias and Sapphira their land and their money was their possession to be used at their disposal. If you want a distilled teaching on the Biblical perspective on Christian private property, read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Genesis 21:31 - ³¹Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba because it was there that the two of them swore an oath.

The name means "well of the oath" or "well of seven."¹¹ Beersheba would later become part of Simeon's tribal inheritance and would be the southernmost part of Israel's land. They'd use it as a saying, "From Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south."

Genesis 21:32 - ³²After they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines.

Abimelech was interested in Abraham and his God. He wanted to have a connection and, hopefully, get a proximity blessing. But, sadly, that's where his interest stopped. Abimelech didn't inquire as to how *he* might get to know this God. He didn't ask to become part of Abraham's house. To do so would've required him to renounce his throne and bow down himself.

Of course, that is what is necessary if we are to come into the house of the Lord, our God. We must renounce all claims to the throne. *We're just pretenders, anyway!* We must bow our hearts before Him and acknowledge that He is King of all, including our own lives.

¹¹ See Kidner, Waltke, Calvin

Genesis 21:33 - ³³ **Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.**

Planting a tree signals several things. First, it suggests Abraham assumed he'd be there quite a while. It also assumes that he'd have the water necessary to keep a tree alive. There's something else here, though. Abimelech wanted Abraham to get the message that he was an *outsider*, that he was not one of them, that he was there because they felt like letting him be there. Fair enough. But, despite his outsider status, we see *Abraham* cultivating and developing. *He's* planting trees and digging wells. *He's* raising flocks and ranging herds. And even though we know that Abraham did not consider this his home, he made it his business to benefit and enrich the world around him. What were the Philistines doing in this text? Thieving, strong-arming, intimidating. But God's family was *producing*. God's family was *fruitful*. And as they went about their pilgrim business, they worshiped God and called on His name. They reminded themselves of His everlasting faithfulness, His never-ending power. And the presence of God in their lives shone like light in the dark.

Genesis 21:34 - ³⁴ **And Abraham lived as an alien in the land of the Philistines for many days.**

What does it mean to live as an alien? It's an important question because we're told, outright, that we are strangers and pilgrims to this world. To live as an alien means we seek for the coming city, the New Jerusalem, because we have no enduring city here. It means to abstain from sinful desires, which will cause unbelievers to glorify God. It means to do the will of God, even if that means being wronged for His sake.¹² That sort of life not only makes the world sit up and notice, but makes us a blessing to our communities.

Larry Ellison wants to create a utopia on his little island. His plan is to change the world's food supply, health systems, and global transportation. How's he doing a decade into the effort? Well, he's built a lot on his acreage, and he's employing a lot of people. But as for the wider world, all we've got is a \$3,000/night spa you can visit, where staff will "track guests' sleep quality, nutrition and blood flow."

God wants to revolutionize this world and He's got a great plan to do it: *You!* You're the ambassador He has put in place so you can meet some Abimelech. As one commentator noted, Christians should live in such a way that, if we were removed from our community, it would be a tragedy. We are pilgrims, not stirring up conflict, but bringing peace, truth, hope, and a testimony of God's powerful presence in the lives of His people, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

¹² Hebrews 13:14 1 Peter 2:11 1 John 2:15-17