

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

Our portion this week continues to focus upon the life of Isaac in the land of promise. Last week we were told of a great famine in the land of Canaan, which caused Isaac to move from Mamre towards Egypt as his father Abraham had done. But YHWH prevented Isaac from going to Egypt. Isaac stopped his journey in the territory of Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar. This week we are told that Isaac is blessed by YHWH and becomes very wealthy and very great. The greatness and wealth of Isaac become a threat and source of envy to Abimelech and his people. At the heart of the strife are wells that were dug by Abraham and reopened by Isaac. Eventually Isaac is driven from the land of Gerar, but this exile does not stop YHWH from blessing Isaac. Eventually, recognizing that Isaac's vast wealth and strength are divinely given, Abimelech seeks to renew with Isaac the treaty his predecessor had made with Abraham. Our portion concludes with the peculiar announcement of Esau's marriage to two Hittite women.

THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 26:12-14 The report of Isaac's great success and wealth
- Genesis 26:15 The oppression by the Gerarites, breaking their covenant with Abraham
- Genesis 26:16-17 The expulsion of Isaac
- Genesis 26:18-19 The restoration of the wells and their original names given by Abraham
- Genesis 26:20-23 Strife with the herdsmen of Gerar
- Genesis 26:24-25 YHWH appears to Isaac
- Genesis 26:26-33 Abimelech seeks to restore the covenant made with Abraham
- Genesis 26:34-35 Esau marries two Hittite women

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the context for verses 12-14?
2. What are the three types of water sources in the Middle East?
3. What realization does Abimelech come to concerning Isaac?
4. What title is given to Isaac?
5. What pattern begins to emerge in this portion?
6. What positive results are gained from the blessings of YHWH?
7. What are the negative outcomes of being blessed by YHWH?
8. What is so significant about the wells?
9. What are the four designations of wells given in this passage?
10. What is the spiritual significance of these wells?
11. What connection with the Messiah is found in this portion?
12. Why does the Torah include the story of Esau's Hittite wives here?

THE TEXT

Genesis 26:12-35 *Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and YHWH blessed him. ¹³And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: ¹⁴for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. ¹⁶And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. ¹⁷And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. ¹⁸And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. ¹⁹And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. ²⁰And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. ²¹And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. ²²And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now YHWH hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. ²³And he went up from thence to Beersheba. ²⁴And YHWH appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the Elohim of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake. ²⁵And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of YHWH, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.*

²⁶Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. ²⁷And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? ²⁸And they said, We saw certainly that YHWH was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; ²⁹that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of YHWH. ³⁰And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. ³¹And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. ³²And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water. ³³And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

³⁴And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: ³⁵which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

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Our portion this week is not an independent unit or story but a continuation of last week's portion. In other words, to understand the significance, meaning, tension, and drama of this week's portion, we must understand the context of the events of the story as it relates to the larger picture. Our portion begins with a very powerful and positive opening statement concerning Isaac's status.

Genesis 26:12-14 *Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and YHWH blessed him. ¹³And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: ¹⁴for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him.*

While this revelation does indeed set the stage for the tensions and conflicts that follow, its true power and significance are not understood until this verse is placed back in the larger context of the previous portion. Therefore, let us briefly revisit last week's portion so that we may truly grasp the importance of this passage and its true revelation.

The fact that Isaac sowed in the land and reaped a great harvest is impressive, and may even be the source of the Philistines' envy. In the ancient Near East a thirty to sixty-fold harvest of barley or wheat was considered a very good harvest. An eighty-fold harvest was considered to be an exceptional harvest. That Isaac planted and reaped a hundred-fold harvest would be almost unheard of in those days. We may recall here Yeshua's teaching of the parable of the sower, where the breakdown of the harvest is similarly recorded.

Matthew 13:8 *But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.*

This hundred-fold harvest by itself would be reason enough for others to envy Isaac. But making this news of a phenomenal harvest even more powerful and unsettling is the fact that Isaac took in a hundred-fold harvest in a time of famine.

Genesis 26:1 *And there was **a famine in the land**, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.*

The severity of the famine was such that Isaac did not intend to stay within the boundaries of the land of promise but to escape the ravages of the famine by going all the way down into Egypt as his father Abraham had done.

Genesis 12:9-10 *And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. ¹⁰And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

Genesis 26:1-2 *And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. ²And YHWH appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of.*

Here we are told that the famine in the days of Abraham was severe and very grievous in the land. That the Torah makes mention of the first famine in the report concerning the second famine demands that we compare these two events. We must conclude, therefore, that the second famine was likewise as severe and as grievous as the first. The great difference between these two stories is the fact that the Sovereign One prohibits Isaac from following the way of his father, thus preventing Isaac from going down into Egypt. Instead, YHWH commands Isaac to stay in the land, confirms the Abrahamic covenant with him, and promises to reward him if he remains in the land of promise.

Genesis 26:2-4 *And YHWH appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: ³sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; ⁴and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

With this severe and grievous famine touching everyone in the land of Canaan, the report that Isaac alone has reaped a hundred-fold return on his produce is not only phenomenal, it is downright miraculous. It is this miracle of abundant provision that confirms the trustworthiness and faithfulness of YHWH to Isaac. If Isaac can trust YHWH for immediate daily provision, he can likewise trust Him to fulfill future promises. While all others in the area are barely eking out enough food for survival, Isaac is bringing in hundred-fold returns on his produce.

We should take note of the fact that the Hebrew word, or better said, words, being translated as "a hundred-fold," are the words *me'ah* (*mem, aleph, hey*) which means "hundred," and the word *she'arim* (*shin, ayin, resh, yud, mem*) which means "gates." We may better understand the description of Isaac's harvest as being enough produce to sell at a hundred gates or markets. Again, while everyone else barely has enough to survive, Isaac has enough to go and sell his produce at a hundred markets.

This may explain how Isaac became so wealthy. As food became scarce, Isaac was able to sell food to the hungry of the region. Slowly, people without food or means to raise money would barter with Isaac for food. Thus, the source of Isaac's great flocks and herds may well have come from these transactions. Clearly we see a foreshadowing of the events that would eventually define the life of Isaac's grandson Joseph. It was a severe famine in Egypt that brought Joseph to power and prominence both in Egypt and in the history of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. By good food management, selling, and bartering for food with the people of Canaan and Egypt, Joseph too became a very wealthy man.

Genesis 41:48-49 *And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. ⁴⁹And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number.*

Genesis 41:55-57 *And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. ⁵⁶And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.*

Genesis 47:27 *And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.*

Genesis 47:13-23 *And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. ¹⁴And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁵And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? For the money faileth. ¹⁶And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. ¹⁷And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. ¹⁸When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: ¹⁹wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate. ²⁰And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's. ²¹And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof. ²²Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands. ²³Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land.*

Although Isaac and his camp may have recognized the great faithfulness and benevolence of the Creator in this abundant blessing, not everyone rejoiced in Isaac's blessings. We have already witnessed that the Philistines were becoming quite envious of Isaac. But this is not the only emotion that is provoked by Isaac's miraculous harvest. Along with envy, we likewise witness fear, resentment, anger, and oppression. We should not be surprised by these emotions. Whenever a stranger moves in and becomes more prosperous, successful, or famous than the long-time resident, there is generally a sense of resentment.

I can remember getting up early one morning to go fishing with my father. We drove to the local lake and staked out our usual spot on the bank by a narrow strait that went under a bridge. The fish loved this spot and so did we. From early morning until early evening we sat there quietly with our lines in the water, waiting for the fish to bite. We tried every lure, every depth, every type of bait we had with us, and still not a single hit. Hour after fruitless hour passed without anything biting but the mosquitoes. As the sun began to go down, our frustration and disappointment levels began to rise. But then suddenly, directly across the bank from us, a nice, elderly gentleman sat down with his pole and tackle box. He was no more than twenty feet away from us. He looked over, smiled, nodded, and gently cast his worm and bobber no less than three feet from mine, and WHAM, he pulled out his first fish!

At first I was excited for him. "Finally," I thought, "the fish are starting to bite." Then WHAM, he pulled out a second fish, and then a third, and then a fourth. Within an hour's time that old thief had stolen about six or seven of my fish! We had been there all day waiting. And now, when the fish were finally starting to get hungry, this old codger came down, moved into our spot, and stole our fish. I started wondering – if I tied enough lead sinkers to my line and cast hard enough, could I hit this guy on the opposite bank in the head and knock him unconscious? Finally, I had enough. My father and I packed up our gear, grumbling the whole time about people crowding in on your spot and ruining the fun of fishing. We climbed up the hill and back to the car and drove silently home. At home, my Mom asked how it had gone. The look on our faces said it all. Not another word was spoken.

I cannot help but think that the Philistines were feeling the same way. Gerar is their city. Abimelech is their king. And now, this interloper from Hebron moves into their town and begins digging wells, planting fields, and raking in everyone's money. Provoked by his quick and miraculous success and fearful of the

growing number of people in his employ, Abimelech finally confronts Isaac and reneges on the hospitality that was once shown to Abraham by the first Abimelech and even by himself.

Genesis 26:16 *And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we.*

Clearly Abimelech is demonstrating signs of fear. Let us pause for a moment and recall some important details. First, let us remember that before Abraham had children, he already had enough loyal servants to field an army of 318 fighting men.

Genesis 14:14 *And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.*

Abraham knew that as a lone sojourner and pilgrim living in a strange land, he was vulnerable to the whims and fancies of every king, clan, and tribe among whom he dwelt. The immorality of these kings, clans, and tribes is evidenced in the two abductions of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Therefore, Abraham learned to train his servants to fight, and he learned to make treaties with those around him that would show themselves willing to welcome him into their land. This later fact is evident in the confederation Abraham made with those around him to wage war with Chedorlaomer as well as in the treaty he made with Abimelech.

Genesis 14:13 *And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.*

Genesis 21:22-24 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest: ²³now therefore swear unto me here by that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. ²⁴And Abraham said, I will swear.*

Since Isaac is the offspring, son, and heir of Abraham, we may assume that Isaac would likewise have trained his people to fight and protect Isaac's wealth, herds, flocks, fields, and family. While Abimelech refers to the fact that Isaac is becoming mightier or more numerous than the Philistines of Gerar, we should recall that Rebekah and Isaac have only two sons thus far. Therefore, the great might and increase must be understood to be Isaac's trained servants.

A second detail we should understand is that the name Abimelech (my father is king) is not a proper name but a title given to all the kings of Gerar. There is no reason to assume that this Abimelech is the same Abimelech who made a covenant with Abraham. With this said, however, it is evident from the Torah that this Abimelech is familiar with the events surrounding the life of Abraham. The fact that the second Abimelech knows of the events surrounding Abraham is supported by comparing the stories of the wives of the patriarchs pretending to be the sisters of their husbands. In the story of Sarah's abduction, Abimelech is told that he is a "dead man" if he touches Sarah. The wombs of all Abimelech's wives and concubines are closed up until Abimelech restores Sarah to Abraham and requests that Abraham pray for healing. Abimelech is told by the Creator that Abraham is a prophet who is not to be messed with.

Genesis 20:3-8 *But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. ⁴But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Adonai, wilt Thou slay also a righteous nation? ⁵Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. ⁶And Elohim said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the*

integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. ⁷Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. ⁸Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.

While Abimelech is possibly humiliated by Abraham and even somewhat angry with him, he sees that Elohim is with Abraham. Therefore, he extends the invitation to Abraham to dwell among them and even enters into a covenant of peace between them.

Genesis 20:15 *And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.*

Genesis 21:22-24 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest: ²³now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. ²⁴And Abraham said, I will swear.*

Later, when Isaac comes down to Gerar, it is clear that he shares the same concern for his wife as Abraham did for Sarah. So Rebekah claims to be Isaac's sister. When Abimelech discovers the truth of Rebekah and Isaac's relationship, he rebukes Isaac and warns his people.

Genesis 26:8-11 *And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. ⁹And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. ¹⁰And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. ¹¹And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.*

The fact that Abimelech warns his men of an impending death for touching the wife of Isaac, the son of Abraham, reveals that he is aware of the threat of the Sovereign One to the first Abimelech – that he is a dead man if he touches Sarah. We may assume that if Abimelech 2 knows about this curse given to Abimelech 1, then he is also aware of the covenant between Abimelech 1 and Abraham. We may note that the covenant between Abimelech 1 and Abraham was to extend to at least two generations. It is this covenant that allows Isaac to dwell safely in the land of Gerar.

A third detail that we should ponder deals with the possible motivation for the growing resentment of the men of Gerar over the wealth and prosperity of Isaac. In my fishing story above, you may have noticed that my first reaction to the success of the kindly old gentleman was one of excitement and joy. I was genuinely happy for the man. But a part of that joy was in the expectation that his abundant blessing was going to spill over into my empty bucket. I saw his success as the beginning of a grand turn of fortune for all the fishermen on the lake. When this expectation failed to materialize, my thoughts of the old codger changed, and suddenly I began blaming my failure on his success. This is also what we may be seeing in the reaction of the Philistines and Abimelech to Isaac's good fortune.

We should note that Isaac was sowing seed in a land which was suffering from a severe famine. We should also understand that the annual rainfall for this part of Israel is less than 254 mm. (10 inches) per year.¹ Water is a vital part of agricultural success.

There were three sources of water in the Middle East in the times of the patriarchs – precipitation, the rivers which rose in amply watered areas but eventually grew smaller as they flowed through the deserts to the sea or inland sinks, and aquifers, or underground, water-filled strata. In areas not reached by the streams, the people relied on wells as their source of water.

We read, therefore, that not only was Isaac sowing seed in the land of Gerar, but he was also reopening the wells that his father had dug.

Genesis 26:18 *And Isaac dugged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

These wells and the water they contain become a great source of contention between Isaac and the men of Gerar. When we combine this contention over the ownership of the water and the wells with the fact that Isaac is bartering and selling grain and produce to those who are radically affected by the famine, the men of Gerar and possibly even the king begin seeing Isaac's gain as their loss. This understanding may be seen in a variant reading of the words of Abimelech.

Genesis 26:16 *And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we.*

The Hebrew word *memenu* (*mem, mem, nun, vav*) can be translated as “than us,” as is the case in the King James Version quoted above. The prefix *me*, however, may also mean “from.” Therefore, we may also rightly translate the words of Abimelech as follows:

Genesis 26:16 *And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier from us.*

In other words, Abimelech is in some sense blaming Isaac for taking advantage of the famine situation to enrich himself while hurting or diminishing the Gerarites. We witness this same sense of resentment and blame among the sons of Laban as they begin to grumble concerning Jacob's success and prosperity among them.

Genesis 31:1-2 *And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. ²And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.*

We likewise see a similar situation developing a little later in the history of Israel as Pharaoh too becomes insecure about Israel's growing numbers and prosperity.

Exodus 1:8-10 *Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. ⁹And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: ¹⁰come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.*

Here we begin to see a pattern that has plagued the children of Israel throughout history.

¹ For the sake of comparison, the annual rainfall in Michigan is 32.23 inches; Wyoming, 13.31 inches; Idaho, 11.71 inches; New Mexico, 8.91 inches; Nevada, 7.87 inches; and Arizona, 7.11 inches.

- ❖ The people welcome the children of Israel to live among them
- ❖ The people see the blessing upon the children of Israel
- ❖ The people share in the blessing upon the children of Israel
- ❖ The people try to ensure that the children of Israel will stay among them
- ❖ The people try to ensure the blessing will stay among them by enslaving the children of Israel
- ❖ The people realize that they are dependent upon the children of Israel for the blessing
- ❖ The people feel enslaved by the children of Israel
- ❖ The people begin to resent the children of Israel
- ❖ The people try to seize the blessing from the children of Israel
- ❖ The people persecute the children of Israel
- ❖ The children of Israel are exiled or executed by the people

We see this pattern in the Abimelechs, who see that Elohim is blessing Abraham. Abraham is invited to dwell in the land, and eventually Abimelech wants to make a covenant with Abraham to bind him to the Gerarites. The second Abimelech, however, likewise sees the blessings upon Isaac, but begins to fear and resent Isaac and asks Isaac to leave his land. When Abimelech 2 realizes that YHWH continues to bless and build Isaac even after his departure from the land of Gerar proper, he too desires to bind Isaac in a covenant. We should note that this covenant is not a new covenant but an affirmation of the Abrahamic covenant made with Abimelech 1. We may note how Abimelech pleads with Isaac. This belies the fact that Isaac is clearly in the position of power. Like Abimelech 1, Abimelech 2 excuses the behavior of his people and claims to have been good, peaceful, and righteous in his dealings with Isaac. Somehow the strife with Abimelech's herdsmen and the wells being stuffed with dirt is overlooked and not even mentioned.

Another example of this pattern of joy turned to resentment and bondage is found in Laban, who loved the idea of Jacob working for him for seven years. Laban saw that YHWH was with Jacob and that all he did prospered. Laban repeatedly renegotiated the contracts of Jacob in an attempt to ensnare him. When Jacob continued to prosper, Laban and his sons began to resent Jacob, who wisely fled the land of Laban.

Joseph too was blessed by YHWH. Potiphar and the jailer both welcomed Joseph and his blessings and placed him in charge of their concerns. They saw that everything Joseph did prospered. We must remember that Joseph was a slave and a prisoner already ensnared at the time.

Pharaoh likewise welcomed Joseph and placed him in charge. Pharaoh and his people were blessed by Joseph. They welcomed all the Hebrews to come and be a blessing in the land of Egypt. But when the Israelites began to prosper and grow strong, Pharaoh and the people suddenly began to fear and persecute the Hebrews. Again and again throughout history this has been the story of the descendants of Abraham. While we may rejoice in YHWH'S blessings upon us, we should be cautious about how the outside world sees our blessings. Envy and jealousy can quickly turn any blessing into a curse. I believe it is wise to follow the teachings of Yeshua in the use of our blessings:

Matthew 6:1-4 *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. ²Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ³But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: ⁴that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.*

We have been called to be a blessing, but we should not boast or flaunt the means to being a blessing that have been entrusted to us. What I have belongs to YHWH; therefore, I myself own little to nothing and have no reason to boast except in YHWH and His Messiah. Enough preaching. Let us return to our portion.

Thus, we witness in our portion the beginning of this pattern as Abimelech and his people begin resenting and persecuting Isaac. But is the wealth and success of Isaac the only reason for the actions of the Philistines? I am going to suggest that there is yet another subtle layer behind the tension between Abimelech and men of Gerar and Isaac.

At the heart of this conflict seems to be a battle over wells and water rights. Let us take a closer look at this battle over the wells and see if we may glean the answer to our question.

In a land where there is less than ten inches of rainfall a year, water means life. Wells are extremely important to survival. We must ask ourselves, therefore, why a people experiencing a famine would intentionally fill up a well and render it useless even to themselves. Our portion tells us that the Philistines had actually filled up the wells that Abraham had dug. They are likewise contending with Isaac over the wells that he is digging.

Genesis 26:15 *For all the wells which his father's servants had dugged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.*

Genesis 26:18 *And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

One possible reason for the Philistines to stop up the wells would be to prevent Isaac's prosperity from growing. It may be that they see the water as the source of Isaac's success. If this is the motive for their behavior, it seems more probable that they would simply drive Isaac away from the wells and keep the abundant (and possibly magic) waters for their own fields and use. But the Torah tells us that they stuffed up the wells with earth, rendering them useless to anyone.

A second possibility for actually stuffing the wells is a defensive measure. Water is life in the desert. People had to procure water for their personal use as well as for their animals and crops. By closing the wells and stuffing them with dirt, the wells were rendered useless. An intruding army could not survive for very long in the wilderness without the provision of water. If the king controlled the water, then he controlled the whole area. By closing up the numerous wells dug by Abraham in the outlying areas, the Philistines limited the water supply that could be used by invading armies.

I believe there is yet another possible answer to the cause of this conflict. We have previously noted how Abraham was a believer in YHWH, the one true Elohim of heaven and earth. This is made very clear in the story of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek and the king of Sodom after Abraham's return from the war with Chedorlaomer. While Melchizedek blesses Abraham in the name of El Elyon, it is Abraham who clarifies and identifies exactly who El Elyon (the most high God) is.

Genesis 14:18-22 *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of El Elyon. ¹⁹And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of El Elyon, possessor of heaven and earth: ²⁰and blessed be El Elyon, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. ²¹And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. ²²And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto YHWH, El Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth.*

In many ways this was Abraham's "great commission" – to reveal YHWH as the one true Elohim of heaven and earth. To this end Abraham and those associated with him often named wells, mountains, and other places to commemorate the life and work of YHWH, the Elohim of Abraham. In the names of these wells and cities the stories are told and retold by believers and non-believers alike.

Genesis 16:13-14 *And she called the name of YHWH that spake unto her, Thou Elohim seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me? ¹⁴Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.*

Genesis 22:14 *And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of YHWH it shall be seen.*

Genesis 28:19 *And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.*

Genesis 32:2 *And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is Elohim's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

Genesis 32:30 *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved.*

Genesis 33:17 *And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.*

Genesis 35:7 *And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there Elohim appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.*

From this pattern demonstrated by the descendants of Abraham we may assume that the wells dug by Abraham and his men bore the names or testimonies of the wonderful works of YHWH, the Elohim of Abraham.

In ancient Near Eastern culture the well was in many ways the very center of the city and its culture. Everyone was dependent upon the well for its life-giving water. If the well had a name, it was known by everyone in the town. In fact, as we have witnessed often in the Torah, the city often took its name from the name of the well. If the well was in the wilderness, its name would have been known by every pilgrim, merchant, and traveler who passed through the area. By naming wells, mountains, and cities after the names or deeds of YHWH, Abraham and his descendants assured that the message of YHWH'S sovereignty would spread throughout the whole area. Evidence of this is seen in the story of the two Abimelechs and their encounters with the patriarchs.

We should note that when Abimelech 1 comes to make a covenant with Abraham, he states very clearly that Elohim has blessed Abraham.

Genesis 21:22-23 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, **Elohim** is with thee in all that thou doest: ²³now therefore swear unto me here by **Elohim** that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.*

But in the story of Abimelech 2 coming to renew this covenant with Isaac, Abimelech clearly knows the name of Isaac's Elohim, and he calls Isaac "the blessed of YHWH."

Genesis 26:28-29 *And they said, We saw certainly that **YHWH** was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; ²⁹that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of **YHWH**.*

Clearly progress has been made in the dissemination of the name of YHWH. No longer is the Elohim of Abraham simply one of the many generic *elohim* of the desert. From Laban in Mesopotamia to Abimelech in Canaan, the name YHWH had been revealed by Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, I would suggest to you that the purpose of filling in the wells of Abraham with earth was to not only prevent the water from being utilized by the enemies of the Philistines, but also to remove the very location of the wells, with their names, from the minds of the people. By removing the names of these

wells, the names and proclamations of YHWH associated with them were likewise removed. We should see in this not simply a battle over water but a battle over the Word and name of YHWH.

We should clearly note the connection between these wells, water, and the Word. We should also recall the connection between the "seed" and the "Word." In explaining the parable of the sower to his *talmidim*,² Yeshua explicitly draws the connection between seed and the Word.

***Luke 8:11** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of Elohim.*

We should note, however, that seed cannot grow without water. In this regard, water may be understood as the Spirit of the Holy One who animates and gives life to His Word and His creation. Thus, water is a symbol of the living Word. Seed is a reference to potential Word. In other words, one may teach the Word to a person, which is like planting seed. But if the Spirit of the Holy One does not quicken that Word or seed, there will be no fruit borne from this labor. It is interesting to note that Isaac not only plants seed, he also digs wells that the water might bring life to the seed he plants.

***Genesis 26:12** Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and YHWH blessed him.*

***Genesis 26:18** And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

We should also note that there are four types of wells listed in this Torah portion.

***Genesis 26:21** And they digged another **well**, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.*

***Genesis 26:15** For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and **filled them with earth**.*

***Genesis 26:18** And Isaac digged again the **wells of water**, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

***Genesis 26:19** And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a **well of springing water**.*

Let us list these four types of wells and understand their spiritual applications.

- ❖ Empty wells
- ❖ Earth-filled wells
- ❖ Wells of water
- ❖ Wells of living water

The first well listed is simply described as a well. A well is, in its simplest form, an empty space capable of being filled with water. In some manner this describes every person. We are all repositories for the Word of YHWH. There is no person on the whole planet that is not capable of receiving the Word of YHWH. We are all created to be vessels of honor for YHWH.

***2 Corinthians 4:6-7** For Elohim, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of Elohim in the face of*

² *Talmidim* is the Hebrew word for "disciples."

Yeshua Messiah. ⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of Elohim, and not of us.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. ²¹If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*

In this regard we may all be considered as wells waiting to be filled by the living Word of YHWH. There are those who may boast of being great repositories of wisdom and knowledge, yet they are completely void of the Word. The apostles Kepha and Yehuda warned of such vain people.

2 Peter 2:17 *These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.*

Jude 1:12 *These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.*

The second type of well mentioned is a well stuffed with earth. While we all have been created to receive the Spirit of the Holy One and His living Word, this does not come to us naturally in our fallen state. While the well is capable of holding life-giving water, it is also capable of holding other things. In our portion, wells are filled with dust from the earth. We may note here that this is the same word used in the story of the creation of Adam. Adam was created from "the dust of the earth."

Genesis 2:7 *And YHWH Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

The dust of the earth represents our flesh. A well stuffed with earth is a description of a carnal person. Instead of sanctifying his vessel for the filling of the Spirit of the Holy One, the carnal man fills his life with the pursuits of the flesh. Since water is life, a stuffed well cannot bring forth life. In many ways this is what Shaul is describing in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 8:5-8 *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind is enmity against Elohim: for it is not subject to the law of Elohim, neither indeed can be. ⁸So then they that are in the flesh cannot please Elohim.*

The earth-stuffed well is good to no one. The earth-stuffed well does not proclaim YHWH, nor does it bring life to anyone. It is not even good to those who filled the well with the dust. There is no fruit to be borne from the carnal life.

The third type of well mentioned is the well of water. We may liken the well of water to a person who indeed hears and receives the Word of YHWH. In fact, this person may be a very good Bible scholar or even a religious leader. But while he may have heard the Word, received the Word, and may even be an expert in the Word, this does not mean that he is living the Word or fulfilling the calling to embody the Word in his life. We are not to simply be hearers or recipients of the Word; we are to be doers of the Word.

Romans 2:13 *For not the hearers of the law are just before Elohim, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

James 1:22 *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

We must be careful to understand that the Pharisees did observe the Torah. They were doers of the Word to the nth degree. But they did it legalistically. It is not enough to simply “do the Word” in our flesh for the sake of reward or out of fear of punishment. Doing the Word in this mindless fashion is simply a vain ritual. It is going to church or synagogue for no other reason than it was what we have been taught to do. This vain, ritualistic living of the Word is mechanical and thoughtless. There is no love or life in it. It is not pleasing to YHWH. A well with water may easily be compared to the Pharisees who vainly fulfill every letter of the law but do not truly keep the spirit of Torah. In the words of the apostle Shaul, the Pharisees’ word was a deadly and toxic word, since the letter of the law kills.

2 Corinthians 3:6 *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

Water that is received but not lived is stagnant and lifeless. Word that is spoken without love or life is likewise stagnant, putrid, and toxic. We are not simply to be a well filled with the lifeless and stagnant Word of YHWH.

The fourth well is a well of living water. This well may be compared to the Spirit-filled believer who has the Torah written in his heart. This person is keeping Torah not because it is a commandment, but because of a great love for YHWH and His Messiah. The living Word is flowing through and from this person, bringing hope and life to all who are touched by it. This well of living water pours out love, life, and encouragement upon the seed that has been planted so that it may come alive and bear fruit for the kingdom. The more this well/person pours out the living water, the more the Creator fills him up again. Here we may draw a direct connection between the well of living water and the person and teachings of Yeshua the Messiah.

John 4:7-15 *There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Yeshua saith unto her, Give me to drink. ⁸(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) ⁹Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. ¹⁰Yeshua answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of Elohim, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee **living water**. ¹¹The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that **living water**? ¹²Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? ¹³Yeshua answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: ¹⁴but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him **a well of water springing up into everlasting life**. ¹⁵The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*

John 7:38 *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

We also see this living water as a source of life and healing in the world to come.

Revelation 21:6 *And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*

Revelation 22:1 *And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of Elohim and of the Lamb.*

Revelation 22:17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

Clearly the Messiah is the source of this living water. I cannot help but make a connection here to last week's Torah portion, which likewise mentions four types of people.

- ❖ The Gentiles
- ❖ The offspring of Abraham
- ❖ The sons of Abraham
- ❖ The heirs of Abraham

In many respects the Gentiles may be compared to the empty well. They have the same potential to receive and live the Word, but they have not yet been filled. The offspring of Abraham are those descendants of Abraham who have the same potential to be filled with the Word of YHWH but have rejected this calling to pursue the matters of the flesh. The sons of Abraham may be compared to the wells of water that have knowledge of their heritage, calling, and the Word of YHWH but lack any sense of love or life in what they are doing. These are the religious who are truly stagnant in their faith. Finally, we have the heirs of Abraham who share the faith of Abraham and do the works of Abraham. These are those who are filled with living water and actively pour themselves out in the Spirit of Messiah to bring life and refreshment to others.

We should likewise recognize that there are still Philistines in the world who seek to choke out and undo what the Spirit of the Holy One wishes to do in and with our lives. There are numerous people in the world today who actively seek to blot out the name of YHWH and His mighty works. There are plenty of people who are willing to stuff the flesh and the carnal world down our throats in order to render us useless to YHWH, ourselves, and others. There are plenty of birds who would love to feast upon the seed that we are called to sow. But if we are faithful, we shall see the success of Isaac and reap a hundred-fold harvest. YHWH has promised that His Word will not return to Him empty.

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: ¹¹so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Finally, we should note that our portion ends with a peculiar insertion about the wives of Esau. At first this story seems completely out of place. But looking at the larger context of the passage, we may understand these last few verses as helping to set up the rest of the Esau/Jacob saga that continues in the next portion. In this regard these verses serve as a bridge tying the last story of Esau and Jacob to the next story of Esau and Jacob. But I believe there is yet another reason for this story being included in this particular portion.

We should note that Esau took two wives, both from the Hittites, who are descendants of Canaan. Since Canaan is the cursed seed of Ham, his descendants are likewise cursed seed. By marrying two Canaanite women, Esau has mixed the seed. We have already witnessed the wretched outcome of such mixing of seed in the story of Noah and the flood. The first wife of Esau is Judith, the daughter of Beerli. The name Beerli means "my well." This is the connection that we need to understand. Instead of drinking living water from the well of YHWH, Esau, who despised his birthright, chooses to drink from the Canaanite well. This verse shows us the depth of Esau's rejection of his birthright and inheritance. Clearly Esau is unworthy to be the heir of Abraham and Isaac. Esau clearly rejects the Word of YHWH and chooses to drink from another well – another word. Here we should see a foreshadowing of the later descendants of Abraham and Isaac, who, like Esau, would forsake the fountains of living water to drink the toxic waters of lifeless idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Over the years many of us have committed this same sin. By choosing man-made religion over the truth of the Torah we hewed out for ourselves broken cisterns that could hold no water. Now, however, we are being called by the Spirit of the Holy One to come to Messiah and drink of the living water that will satisfy our thirst for truth and righteousness. Let us not turn our backs on the fountain of living water to marry ourselves to vain pagan traditions and man-made religion. Let us rather come to the living waters and drink until these waters flow from our bellies like rivers, bringing life to the arid, spiritual landscape around us.

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