

## Introduction

Near the end of our passage there is the establishment of “Beersheba”. This becomes an important location in the history of Israel representing the southern boundary of the Promised Land. If you read through your Bible, from time to time you will come across the phrase, “from Dan to Beersheba”. Dan was the northernmost settlement of the promised land and Beersheba the southernmost. The land of Philistia was just to the south and west of the Promised Land the the Philistines lived along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea south and west of Beersheba.

Boundary markers are significant things. In the age of the car, air travel, and the internet, boundaries seem increasingly insignificant. But there are still some boundaries that resonate if you bring them up. In American geography there is the Mississippi River, the Rocky Mountains, and the Mason Dixon Line represent certain boundaries that carry meaning in one way or another.

State lines can also carry significance. Up until last year, I lived in the state of Georgia for about 20 years. I remember crossing over Lake Hartwell in the moving truck around this time last year and feeling the significance of that moment. Likewise, whenever I return to Georgia I do so as a South Carolingian.

Boundaries carry significance. G.K. Chesterton once said that you shouldn’t tear down a wall or a fence until you first understood why it is there in the first place. He is not getting this from nowhere, [Proverbs 22:28](#) says, “Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set.”

This passage this morning establishes a landmark between Abraham and Abimelech and that is significant. As we are nearing the end of our series on the life of Abraham we are seeing more and more that the nations are coming into view. This is very much the case in our passage this morning as Abimelech is seeking to be united with Abraham.

The passage breaks down into three sections:

1. The Nations Seek God’s Blessing (vv. 22-24)
2. The Nations Need Discipling (vv. 25-31)
3. The Nations are Fickle but God is Faithful (vv. 32-34)

# The Nations Seek God's Blessing (vv. 22-24)

Last week we considered the birth of Isaac and the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. You'll recall that all this has taken place in the land of the Philistines where Abimelech is king. Abraham came into the area back in [Gen. 20](#) when Abimelech seized Sarah. In that account, God confronted Abimelech and told Abimelech to go to Abraham and ask for prayer. One of the things I pointed out was how Abimelech desired Abraham to stay in the land. Abraham has done so and now Abimelech shows up again seeking to further establish his relationship with Abraham.

All of this points to the theme of this opening section which is *the nations seek God's blessing*. In the Bible, the nations around Israel are rarely, if ever, in a neutral relationship with God's people. The nations are either seeking to destroy God's people ([Ps. 2](#) "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain against the LORD and His messiah?!") or the nations are seeking God's blessing by allying themselves with Israel.

Here we have a clear example of the latter. Abimelech and his commander Phicol come to Abraham and confess that "**God is with you in all that you do**". Because of this, Abimelech wants to enter into a covenant with Abraham that would continue on unto his descendants after him.

[Haggai 2:7](#) offers a title for the coming messiah and it is "The Desire of the Nations". Throughout the Old Testament there are accounts where God's anointed servant is clearly the desire of the nations. When David becomes king in Israel he attracts men to serve him from the nations surrounding Israel. Go and look through the list of David's mighty men and you will find names that are not Hebrew names. David attracts the nations. The same of true of Solomon. Kings and rulers from the nations surrounding Israel travelled to marvel at the glory and of Solomon.

One of the chief reasons that God blesses His people is so that the nations would be attracted and brought in. This is what is going on with Abraham. God richly blesses Abraham and wherever he goes this is apparent. Abimelech, king of Philistia notices and wants to be connected with Abimelech.

One of the things I pray for each week in the prayer for the church in the world is that God would "provide for us, [His] people: houses we did not build, cisterns we did not dig, and vineyards we did not plant; *that the ends of the earth will remember and turn to You.*"

We pray for God's blessing and provision over us and this is a good thing. But we should never forget that God's will attract the world around us. If God blesses His church, the world will become interested. As God's people we must be prepared to share God's blessings with a world that is deeply in need of God's blessing and discipleship according to God's Word.

# The Nations Need Discipling (vv. 25-31)

And this leads us to our next section which is that the nations need discipling.

Back in [Gen 20](#) and here in [Gen 21](#) Abimelech is a mixed bag. His instincts are pointed in the right direction but he also needs to be taught by Abraham, God's prophet.

Back in [Gen 20](#) he took Abraham's wife but then he tries to defend himself and blame Abraham. In the end though he asks Abraham to pray for him and to stay with him. Here there are similar things going on. Abimelech wants to enter into covenant with Abraham and Abraham is willing.

However, Abraham points out that Abimelech's servants had stolen a well of water from him. Abimelech again tries to shift the blame saying he didn't know *and Abraham didn't tell him*. These are not the words of a ruler who is aware of what is going on in his kingdom.

Abimelech is representative here of what it looks like for the nations to come into covenant with God's people. They want the blessings of the covenant but they need to be taught what it means to be in the covenant.

In many ways, this is what much of the New Testament epistles are all about. As the apostles go out to the ends of the earth, presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ, gentiles from the nations come streaming into the church. They are seeking God's blessings in Christ (which is a good thing) but they need to be disciplined. They need to be taught what it means to no longer walk in the ways of the nations but to walk as children of God.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians are great examples of this because it is so clear that they are having a hard time shaking off their old habits. They need to be disciplined through all sorts of ethical issues and Paul walks them through it.

What this means for you and for us is this. If God blesses you individually or us as a church, the general pattern is that those who are outside the covenant are going to be attracted to the blessings of the covenant. What is needed at that point is discipleship. Consider what Jesus tells His disciples in the Great Commission:

Abimelech wanted to be connected with Abraham. But just as before, he needed to be reproved by Abraham. They are able to enter into covenant and Abraham sets aside seven ewe lambs as a witness that Abraham dug the well.

# The Nations are Fickle, God is Faithful (vv. 32-34)

Moving to the final section of our passage we see what Abraham does after he has made a covenant with Abimelech and Phicol. Abraham plants a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and calls

on the name of the LORD. And the name that Abraham invokes here is “the Everlasting God” (’El ’olam).

There are a few things going on here that we should consider. First, there is the mention of a tamarisk tree. Throughout the life of Abraham there are two peculiar things that come up from time to time. First as Abraham goes from place to place, he often builds altars to God. Second, Abraham is often associated with trees. Whether it is him planting a tree here or sitting under trees like the Oaks of Mamre. Trees and altars are connected in the Bible and they represent ascending to God or communing with God.

Abraham has just entered into a covenant with a king of Philistia but the very next things Abraham does is commit himself once again to God.

The covenant Abraham made with Abimelech is supposed to last through generations so that there would be peace between their descendants. But if you know the rest of the story of Israel, you know that there is not always peace with the Philistines. In fact, the Philistines become one of the chief adversaries of Israel during the time of the Judges and kings of Israel.

The Philistines aren’t even apart of the Promised Land. They aren’t one of the groups of people that are mentioned when Israel is entering into the land. This takes us back to the boundary markers that I mentioned at the beginning. Philistia is southwest of the Promised Land and the well at Beersheba was to have been a boundary marker that represented the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, the king of Philistia.

But the Philistines did not keep their end of the covenant. In Judges and Samuel, the Philistines are coming into the land and oppressing God’s people.

In the Bible the nations are attracted to God’s blessing, they are even open to God’s discipline, however, they can also often be fickle. Like the Philistines they can forget the covenant and turn on God’s people.

This too is a reality for us as we seek to open the doors of the church to the world around us so that God’s blessings in Christ might flow to the nations. This may mean that people walk through the doors of the church to receive God’s blessing, only to turn on God’s people in the end. What do we do? Do we close the doors of the church to protect ourselves? No, rather, like Jesus, we open ourselves to the possibility of pain.

The church being open to the world is like being open to love. C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or

coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable...The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is Hell.

We must entrust ourselves to God that we will draw the nations to Himself. For that is indeed what will happen.

**Revelation 21:22–26 ESV**

<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!