

# Deal Kindly With One Another

Genesis 21:22-34

Go ahead and be turning to Genesis 21 in your Bibles. Don't you love hearing that? I don't know of many studies in Genesis that venture much past Babel, the calling of Abraham, his offering of Isaac, or the life of Joseph. I love that we're teaching through all of it, and I love that we as a church have the desire to be taught it. Just to briefly recap the last couple of lessons, Abraham and Sarah have been through it! Last time we saw Abraham basically banish his firstborn son, Ishmael, as well as the woman who bore him, the Egyptian slave Hagar. I can't imagine the confusion and hurt that Abraham lived with for almost fourteen years. You know there had to have been a measure of attraction to Hagar from having been with her, a connection from having fathered a child through her. She was the mother of his son, Ishmael was his firstborn, and now there was an empty space in the caravan (and his heart) that they once occupied. Departing from God's perfect plan is always accompanied by confusion and pain.

Prior to this, however, Abraham and Sarah experienced ELATION at the birth of THEIR child, the fulfillment of God's promise. It was 25 YEARS in the making, but through that WAITING, and then the MIRACULOUS BIRTH their lives were blessed, and their faith strengthened.

However, there was an even EARLIER SCENE that warrants inclusion in our review because tonight's passage is the PART TWO to that one. Right after God reaffirmed his promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son in one year, Abraham sojourned in Gerar. Yeah, this is the time when Abraham was unfaithful to God and his wife, giving her away as "his sister" AGAIN, this time to King Abimelech, in order to PROTECT HIMSELF from harm instead of TRUSTING GOD to protect him. God spoke to King Abimelech in a dream before he had a chance to lay a hand on Sarah, warning him that he and everyone that was his would DIE if he didn't return Sarah to Abraham. The king obeyed God, but think about how he now saw Abraham. Abraham was the man of God, but he couldn't be trusted because of this deception. Abraham continued to sojourn in this region long after Isaac was born, but this bad taste remained in the king's mouth. So, with tonight's passage, we're probably around four years down the road. Now, God's Word says...

## **Genesis 21:22-24**

**22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, God is with you in all that you do. 23 Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned. 24 And Abraham said, I will swear.**

This is a BIG DEAL! Pretty AUSPICIOUS! The king and the commander of his army were meeting with Abraham. It's clear that they took him seriously. Abraham led a household of warriors, but more than that, GOD WAS WITH HIM. While they probably DIDN'T FOLLOW Abraham's God, they understood that HE WAS REAL, and that ABRAHAM ENJOYED DIVINE PROVISION AND PROTECTION from Him.

As per our review, Abimelech already had a close encounter with Abraham's God when he was warned by Him in a dream to RETURN ABRAHAM'S WIFE OR ELSE! Now the king arrives at the dwelling of this hundred-and-something year old man, his ninety-something year old wife, AND THEIR TWO OR THREE YEAR OLD SON. Do you think he'd heard about how God had promised this son to them almost THREE DECADES PRIOR, even naming him before he was born? Do you think he'd heard how Abraham had once routed the armies of FOUR KINGS when the armies of five kings couldn't? The MIRACULOUS was a WAY OF LIFE with this family.

Abimelech's recognition of God's activity in Abraham's life was yet another fulfillment of God's promise to make Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:2). God also promised that Abraham would be a blessing, and King Abimelech understood that, as long as Abraham was in the land, he stood to be blessed with him. The LORD had made Abraham a picture of what King David later longed to be...

### **Psalm 86:17**

**Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.**

David's prayer was that his life would be so blessed and so remarkable that the only explanation for it would be God's favor. Despite his failings, Abraham had that reputation. **"God is with you in all that you do."** It's tragic that King Abimelech felt the need to get this commitment from Abraham. While Abraham was a man of God, he was also known for being deceptive. THIS MUST NOT BE the case with followers of Christ. Paul describes believers as AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, God making His appeal through us that folks be reconciled to Him! How will they come to believe our message if we aren't trustworthy?! This is why we must carefully GUARD OUR TESTIMONIES before an onlooking, lost world, and that doesn't mean be better at hiding the discrepancies between our lives and our message. People are watching to see if our lives MATCH our message.

Abimelech essentially made Abraham swear by his God's Name to not deal falsely (as he had done previously). In this instance, God was called upon as a WITNESS of their treaty with one another, and as an AVENGER if one of them ever broke the treaty and wronged the other.

"I will swear." Abraham agreed. This was not Abraham's first treaty made with someone who wasn't necessarily a believer. We've already talked about the Battle of Nine Kings. When the four kings of Chedorlaomer's Confederacy routed the five of the Jordan River Alliance, taking Lot captive along with all of Sodom and Gomorrah, ABRAHAM DIDN'T RESCUE HIM ALONE. While living at Hebron, Abraham formed an alliance of his own BY TREATY with three Amorite men: Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. Neither in that alliance nor in this one with Abimelech was Abraham compromising in his convictions. It clearly hadn't compromised his testimony because he was known as a man of God! Abraham, the friend of God, didn't spurn those among whom he sojourned, but formed partnerships when necessary. After all, before the LORD had called him out of his former life, ABRAHAM WAS ONE OF THESE GUYS! His willingness to work with them and have close relations with them is a model to us for maintaining God-honoring relationships with nonbelievers with the aim of REACHING THEM with the gospel.

Abraham was ready to make this treaty with Abimelech, but before ratifying it, he had an issue to bring to the king...

#### **Genesis 21:25-26**

**25 When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, 26 Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.**

Though Abimelech's was seeking assurances from Abraham that he wouldn't deal falsely with him AGAIN, Abimelech wasn't blameless either. Abraham had dug a well, and it was taken from him, and not by just any of the king's subjects. IT WAS HIS OWN SERVANTS! This was a problem in Abraham's day. If you weren't careful, others might swoop in and claim the wells you had dug as their own, or they would fill them back in with earth to preserve the water supply for themselves. Again, Abraham was willing to enter into a covenant with the king, but there was AN ISSUE THEY HAD TO WORK OUT FIRST. While we don't have a TON of details regarding the exact back-and-forth of this conversation, it does raise the issue of COMMUNICATING HARD TRUTHS. In a book that the staff is reading together, Paul David Tripp said this regarding times when others you rely upon disappoint you...

**"When this happens to you, you will deal with the sin, weakness, and failure of others with forgiveness and restorative wisdom or with subtle denial, quiet bitterness, active or slow-burn anger, or the disloyalty of slander."**

Is anyone here struggling like that inside, with denial, bitterness, active or slow-burn anger? Tripp takes that list of responses straight from Ephesians 4, where Paul said...

#### **Ephesians 4:25-27**

**25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another (now I know Paul was writing to believers, and we can't REALLY classify Abimelech as such, but the principle of upright and upfront communication still applies with all). 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.**

Paul was saying that YOU'RE RIGHT TO BE ANGRY OVER SIN and wrongdoing. Such things SHOULD bother you, and not only when it affects you, but any time. That said, we should never give ourselves permission to behave or speak poorly just because someone else does; God doesn't overlook our sin just because we felt provoked by another's. We see no evidence that Abraham was DISRESPECTFUL or ANTAGONISTIC in confronting Abimelech with his servants' seizure of his well. Nor do we have any reason to believe that Abraham behaved with hostility toward the king, badmouthing him to anyone who would listen, at any point from the time the well was seized to the time he brought the matter to the king. Paul went on to say...

## **Ephesians 4:29-32**

**29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**

KEEP IN MIND that we're studying A PASSAGE ABOUT CONFRONTATION! Abraham and Abimelech, I believe, modeled upright communication, and Paul's message to the Ephesians lends FURTHER INSIGHT on WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE to HANDLE CONFRONTATION, what to do and what NOT to do. When we're wronged, our flesh wants to lash back; it's easy to give yourself permission to tear another person down in anger when wronged. A softly-spoken cruel word can cut just as much as a LOUD one. Paul says, "Don't tear down! BUILD UP! Address the situation in a way that's CONSTRUCTIVE and TEACHES the other person to be BETTER." Sometimes our INTENTIONS in confronting someone with a hard truth may be RIGHT, but we don't know how to go about it. TAKE A BREATH, SLOW DOWN, AND DEPEND UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT, and believe me, THIS IS FOR ME. Paul says "**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice;**" don't even let those things enter the equation. Shut them down! Instead, seek to "**be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you,**" and it doesn't matter if that other person isn't saved; GOD WANTS TO SAVE THEM and forgive their sins, and YOUR SUPERNATURAL RESPONSE to a problem you have with them could be just the thing that CRACKS THE DOOR OF THEIR HEART OPEN to the gospel.

THIS IS HOW WE OUGHT TO HANDLE GRIEVANCES. From what's revealed to us in Genesis, Abraham hadn't badmouthed the king to others, and even if he had, WE shouldn't; "**put away slander.**" He didn't just bottle-up his frustration until it EXPLODED or hold onto the transgression and let it eat him up from the inside out, never saying anything about it, but coldly carrying on with the king in all future interactions. "**Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, malice...**" What's more, when he confronted the king, he didn't try to RUSH HIM, you know, "loaded for bear," as we say, attempting to set him back on his heels; when someone wades into a dispute in such a way, it's usually an indicator that they already don't trust you to care for their problem, OR because their complaint lacks merit and they're spicing it up with feigned outrage. So many arguments consist more of EMOTION rather than OBJECTIVE TRUTH.

Finally, while Abraham, no doubt, understood that Abimelech was pointing back to Abraham's past, deceptive dealings with him, I don't get the sense that Abraham was flinging his own accusation about the well back at the king to lessen the focus on his own misdeed. No, it's apparent to me that Abraham's goal was to make things right, not just the stolen well, but the wounded relationship. "*King, I want things to be right too, and while we're talking openly and honestly with one another, there's something we need to talk about. I can't act like things are okay between us while THIS PROBLEM exists.*"

When Paul wrote to his disciple, Timothy, about dealing with opponents—and let's face it, when we're in a confrontational moment with someone, the other person feels like an opponent—Paul taught him that...

## **2 Timothy 2:24**

**And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,**

What if you looked at confrontation as an OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH? Now, I know there's the very real chance that you could be the one needing to learn something in the situation, but in the event you aren't, what if you made it your goal to teach the other person through the confrontation? Not to "SET THEM STRAIGHT," but to HELP THEM UNDERSTAND you and the situation better. Even if you're the one who needs to learn and grow in the situation, a desire to help from you will make that possible! Paul says the Lord's servant corrects...

## **2 Timothy 2:25-26**

**25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**

GOD MAY GRANT THEM REPENTANCE, and your relationship with the offending person NEEDS TO BE INTACT when that time comes! Through your GENTLE response to wrongdoing, could play a part in God's plan to SET THEM FREE from the devil's snare! THEY COULD GET SAVED, or they could finally GAIN VICTORY over a SINFUL STRONGHOLD in their life. It's about WINNING THE PERSON, not the argument. As Jesus said...

## **Matthew 18:15**

**If your brother** (or we'll say in this instance, "someone close to you," since we can't really call Abimelech a "believer," so "If someone close to you") **sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.**

And isn't this how it looks like Abraham handled the situation? And does the king respond back in hostility? I don't think so! He doesn't exactly take full responsibility for Abraham's well being seized; he simply says, "I didn't know about it," and we have no reason to assume otherwise. The sense I take from this passage and from Abimelech is, "*You should've come to me sooner with this, Abraham.*" BUT THAT'S HARD TOO, ISN'T IT?! We can fear the BLOW BACK from confronting someone with an offense, and so, instead of speaking openly, honestly, and LOVING them with the TRUTH, we just swallow hard, and things stay the same or WORSEN. We each have to weigh that possibility when considering confronting someone, and definitely bathe the situation in PRAYER, but always remember that LOVE and TRUTH aren't opposed to one another. Jesus is the personification of both, so they go hand in hand, and TRUTH and FORGIVENESS is far richer soil for relationships to grow in than PERMISSIVENESS and SILENT HURT.

Thankfully, the king didn't respond that with hostility, so in verse 27, Abraham...

### **Genesis 21:27-30**

**27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. 28 Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. 29 And Abimelech said to Abraham, What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart? 30 He said, These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.**

Abraham gave Abimelech a walking, talking...err, BLEATING, living, breathing reminder, SEVEN OF THEM ACTUALLY, that he dug the well. This wasn't a TRANSACTION. Abraham wasn't buying off the king or buying back the well. These ewes were a REMINDER to the king that he agreed, that day, that the well was Abraham's. Each time someone looked upon them or their offspring, they'd be reminded, "THE MATTER'S SETTLED."

### **Genesis 21:31-32**

**31 Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. 32 So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.**

"Beersheba" means "well of the oath" or "well of seven."



You can see Beersheba on the map. If you look at the Dead Sea (the lower, larger body of water), and then go to about 8:30 around the Dead Sea you'll see Beersheba. The word "swear" or "swore" appears three times in this passage, as does the word "seven," and they're brought together as part of the explanation of the name of the location, the "Well of the Oath," or the "Well of Seven."

Now to quickly deal with the elephant in the room, some of you may be thinking, "The king and his commander were Philistines?" It's UNCERTAIN. This account of Abimelech, "the king of Gerar" (Genesis 20:1), doesn't line up with the historical record of the Philistines we're familiar with, the ones who antagonized Israel through the time of the united kingdom. The designation "land of the Philistines" could be ANACHRONISTIC, meaning that it's for the modern reader, like when the area where Hagar and Ishmael wandered was called "Beersheba" before Abraham gave the area its name. So, that name could

just be a designation for the land and not its inhabitants (a reference to its future inhabitants), or Abimelech's people could be an earlier group of Philistines who had settled the land before an invading group of people from the sea came along and grew into the nation of Philistines that we know.

That said, there's always the chance that the Philistine historical record or our understanding of it is flawed, and the people ruled by Abimelech and the Philistines of King Saul and David's day are one and the same. If that's the case, then it's clear that relations broke down over time, and we'll even see the relationship begin to sour in the very next generation with Isaac. However, in this moment in time, the two parties parted ways SATISFIED and in PEACE...

### **Genesis 21:33-34**

**33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.**



The tree in tonight's sermon graphic is a tamarisk tree. It grows like a shrub, but it can reach a height of about 20 feet, so its shade would serve to cool Abraham's tents as he pitched them by it. It's a hard wood, which means it's slow growing. All of these details combined imply that Abraham planned on living there for a while. This treaty between Abimelech and Abraham assured each of them of the other's peaceful intentions toward him, therefore, Abraham would continue sojourning in the land in PEACE. The act of planting this tree was also an act of FAITH. Abraham was setting up a bit of an oasis in Beersheba, first setting up a source of water and now shade. The trees he would plant there would require a reliable source of water, and Abraham trusted the LORD to continue providing it. I know it's just a tree, and I doubt Abraham performed a big ceremony about planting it, but planting that tree in that place under those circumstances is as straightforward an illustration of everyday LIVING BY FAITH as you're going to get.

Dwelling under one's tree is seen in scripture as a sign of dwelling in PEACE (Zechariah 3:10). This treaty, the LORD'S provision, and Abraham's trust in the continuation of that provision evidenced in the planting of this tree all indicated that Abraham was entering a time of PEACE. Yes, we know that times of peace are always preceded and followed by times of trial, but we don't fritter away the times of

peace in anxiety over unknown future hardship. We live thankfully in the NOW and trust Him for the LATER.

Now Abraham, who was no stranger to constantly changing seasons of joy and sorrow, called upon the Name of the LORD, the EVERLASTING GOD who had gone with him and would go with him through it all, and this really is a beautiful BOOKEND to the passage. King Abimelech told Abraham, "**Swear to me HERE by God that you will not deal falsely with me.**" Abraham swore such an oath THERE, and THERE, the scriptures say, he called upon the Name of the LORD, "the Everlasting God." You see, over time, this is how Abraham had grown to know the LORD...

#### **Genesis 17:7-8**

**7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an EVERLASTING covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an EVERLASTING possession, and I will be their God.**

The LORD has to be the Everlasting God in order to be able to FAITHFULLY carry out such promises. We don't have time to get into it tonight, but the existence of the temporary universe itself is proof of the Everlasting God's existence because EVERY TEMPORARY EFFECT is the result of an ETERNAL CAUSE. In case you're unsure of who that God is, Isaiah exultantly cries out...

#### **Isaiah 40:28-31**

**28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?**

**The LORD is the EVERLASTING God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.**

**He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.**

**29 He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.** That's Abraham.

**30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;**

**31 but they** (hundred-year-old men and ninety-year-old women and precious believers at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church) **who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.**

This is our God, the Everlasting God who became flesh, whose INCARNATION and birth we're preparing to celebrate, as Isaiah says...

#### **Isaiah 9:6**

**For to us a child is born,**



**to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
EVERLASTING Father, Prince of Peace.**

And that Son who was given to us would go on to encourage His followers, saying...

**Matthew 28:20b**

**And behold, I am with you ALWAYS, to the end of the age.**

And I believe that's, at least, part of what Abraham was remembering as He worshiped the Everlasting God: the fact that He was ALWAYS with Him, in times of rejoicing and heartache, trials and peace. He had experienced God's presence in those times, and so have many of us. Jesus ever lives to fulfill His promise through His ministry in our lives as our Great High Priest. As the writer of Hebrews wrote...

**Hebrews 7:23-25**

**23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood PERMANENTLY, because he continues FOREVER. 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he ALWAYS LIVES to make intercession for them.**

Abraham knew the God he followed was powerful. He knew He was the God of all. After all, the LORD had called Abraham out of paganism, and in THIS encounter, Abraham got to see that, even though this mighty king didn't follow his God, HE FEARED HIM, and conducted himself accordingly. The covenant made between Abraham and Abimelech was a covenant that was meant to extend well beyond their lifetimes. The king said, "**Swear to me HERE by God,**" and THERE Abraham swore, and THERE Abraham worshiped the EVERLASTING God who has the ETERNAL POWER (Romans 1:20) to FOREVER ENFORCE the covenant that was made.

So, we see TWO MAJOR THEMES DEVELOPED TONIGHT: BIBLICALLY COMMUNICATING HARD TRUTHS and relying upon the Everlasting God WHO IS THE TRUTH as we do it. At the end of the day, like most things in the life of the believer, it's about TRUST. When we suffer, will we trust Him? When we're living in relative peace, knowing that it can't last in this sin-broken world, will we trust Him? When it comes to putting arms and legs and THOUGHTFUL WORDS to our LOVE, sharing TRUTH with others even when it's uncomfortable for them and us, WILL WE TRUST HIM? The Everlasting God of Abraham is OUR GOD too, and He's as faithful to us as He is to Abraham, yes, despite our failings too. I pray we'll trust and REST in Him. "O for grace to trust Him more."