

Journey Through The Cities of Refuge

Lesson #12

Shechem: Digging Wells

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Significance of Wells In The Bible

The well is a potent symbol that appears throughout the Old and New Testaments.

- Wells represent various Spiritual Truths, Divine Encounters & Divine Revelation.
- Wells are often depicted as places of Sustenance and Covenantal Significance.
- Wells represent places of "living water," representing the Holy Spirit and eternal life.
- Wells are often seen as crucial turning points in one's life.
- Wells are places of conflict, spiritual renewal, inheritance
- Wells are seen as the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Wells act as gathering places for betrothal and community.

Key: Wells are seen as the calling to draw from the living waters of God Himself.

Wells are places where God meets His people, reveals His promises, and refreshes weary souls.

Gen. 16:7-14 One day The Angel of The Lord found Hagar at a spring and instructed her to return home. Pregnant and alone, she had fled from Sarah's mistreatment of her.

He instructs her to return to Sarah and submit to her authority.

Divine Promise: "I will give you more descendants than you can count."

She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?" ¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi ["well of the Living One who sees me"]

- This well became a place of revelation and hope. He saw her in her distress.

The encounter at this spring marks a pivotal moment in Hagar's life,

as she receives Divine Instruction and Promise concerning her son Ishmael.

Hagar is a non-Israelite, a woman with no power or status. Hers is a story of exile;

a story of meeting God in the midst of her pain and abandonment.

In the midst of her pain and struggle, Hagar receives God's blessing and promises.

This is good news for those of us who wander in desert places, who weep over the consequences of our own decisions. Jesus is to be found, ready to meet us at the place of despair when it seems that God is absent or that God's promises are false. God comes to us in wilderness places.

Open My Eyes To Your Well In The Desert

Context: Sarah had commanded that he get rid of Hagar and Ishmael.

She considered Ishmael a threat to the secure future and inheritance of their son, Isaac.

Gen. 21:14 So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Consider: The weight of the pack on her shoulders, and the weight crushing her heart — the fear, the shock, the disbelief — all blurred together as Hagar felt her future slip away. What will our future be now? How will I provide for him? Who will take care of us? When our heart sinks with grief for Hagar and her losses, we remember our own story of a terrifying moment — a conversation, a call, a traumatic experience — when we knew our life would never be the same.

When Abraham sent Hagar away, Scripture twice stresses that he gave her a skin of water. The waterskin becomes the Only Visible Provision for the Egyptian bondswoman and her son. Its rapid depletion in the Wilderness of Beersheba dramatizes their helplessness apart from divine intervention.

Gen. 21:15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush.

Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away.

'I don't want to watch the boy die,' she said, as she burst into tears.

Final Desperation and Vulnerability: The desert shrub represents the last, inadequate form of shelter. By placing him there, Hagar acknowledges that human resources (water skin) have failed.

The "Spot" of Despair: She sits "a bowshot away" because she cannot bear to watch him die.

This distance marks her complete emotional and physical resignation

Divine Hearing and Intervention: This act of helplessness sets the stage for God to intervene, emphasizing that God hears the cries of the marginalized.

- God delighted to expand Hagar's perspective on an impossible situation.

Gen. 21:17-18 God heard the boy crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar?"

Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.'

- God planted a seed of new dreams and told her to revive the boy's hope by revealing God's good plans for her son's future.

Gen. 21:19-20a God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

- This action represents Hagar's obedience to God's provision.
- It highlights the importance of faith and obedience, even in the midst of trials.

^{20a}And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer.

Gen. 25:12-16 Ishmael did indeed become a father of many nations.

Note: The water well existed all along. God didn't make the well appear out of nowhere.

Hagar just didn't see it. God opened her eyes to His provision right in front of her.

It represents a spiritual awakening and a revelation from God. It signifies God's presence and his ability to provide for those in need, even in the most desolate of places.

Digging Wells With Abraham In The Promised Land

Abraham dug multiple wells in the Promised Land to secure water for his flocks and family, to signify ownership and to establish a lasting legacy.

His most significant well is about 3800 years old in Beersheba, the home of the Patriarchs. Beersheba, located in the Negev desert, means "dry land." Annual rainfall is 6-8."

Most people were nomadic shepherds. Water was vital for survival. In a land of famine and scarcity, a flowing well could mean the difference between life and death.

Summary of Gen. 21:25-34 Abimelech, king of Gerar, recognizes God's blessing on Abraham.

A Treaty of Peace: Abimelech, along with his army commander Phicol, visits Abraham to establish a covenant, desiring for Abraham to swear he will act kindly towards him and his descendants, as they have done to him.

A Dispute Over Water: Before confirming the treaty, Abraham complains to Abimelech about a well his servants had seized.

The Pact of Beersheba: Abimelech agrees that the well belongs to Abraham. To seal the agreement, Abraham gives Abimelech seven ewe lambs as a witness that he dug the well.

- He confronted the injustice, and the well was restored to him.

A New Beginning: They call the place Beersheba, "well of the oath" or "well of seven".

Gen. 21:33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba to mark a place of worship and to call on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God symbolizing a lasting, rooted relationship with God.

The tamarisk tree, evergreen, is a hardy, long-lived desert tree with fine, feathery foliage, capable of thriving in arid, salty environments. It can reach a height of 50'. At night, its needles absorb moisture from the air and disperse a cooling vapor in the heat of the day.

Because tamarisk trees can take centuries to reach full maturity, Abraham planting one signifies an investment in future generations rather than immediate personal benefit.

The tamarisk tree symbolizes God's Eternal Covenant, enduring provision, and faithfulness.

- It represents a long-term investment in future generations and a testament of faith, thriving in harsh, salty conditions to provide shade and rest.

Planted by Abraham in Beer-sheba, it symbolizes covenant, long-term faith, God's provision, and deep-rooted endurance in hostile conditions.

Symbol of Resilience: Its ability to survive in arid, salty environments symbolizes spiritual perseverance.

Genesis 26 is the only chapter where Isaac is the main character.

- His life is covered by highlighting the trials he had to face.

It is significant that the name of Isaac is associated with "wells" seven times.

The first well by which Isaac is seen is that of Beer Lahai-roi.

- Well of the Living One who sees me [Gen. 24:62; 25:11].
- It told of the unfailing care of the ever-living and ever-present God.

Genesis 26: Isaac & Faith In The Famine

It begins not with rain, but with its absence. The sun burned down on the land, unrelenting. Crops withered like parchment. The wind carried no moisture, only dust and memory. The animals grew lean, and the people grew silent. Somewhere in the midst of this famine, this drought of provision and direction, walked a man named Isaac, the quiet patriarch, the bridge between promise and fulfillment. A man living under a covenant he didn't initiate, still learning what it meant to walk by faith. [Unknown author]

Gen. 26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines.

- Famine in the land was not new. It wasn't Isaac's first nor would it be the last.

Gerar is a border town in the southwestern reaches of Canaan, set on the edge of the Negev and the coastal plain. South of the promised land but not all the way to Egypt. Fertile valley supplied by intermittent streams, sustaining crops even in famine years.

Land of the Philistines. Philistine= to invade or to pass through; roll or wallow in self-pity.

The sworn enemy of the Israelites

- Opposing Power of the Flesh: the "animal forces" of the human in opposition to spiritual progress, embodying the struggle to live spiritually.
- Active Hostility [Godless Defiance]: Represents a defiant, hostile spirit that refuses to recognize God's sovereignty. Remnant of the old nature that actively attacks spiritual life.
- The "Uncircumcised" Heart: Their lack of circumcision symbolizes a lack of dedication to God, acting from, and in, the unrenewed, natural human heart rather than by the spirit.
- Threat to Divine Provision [Filling the Wells]: They represent spiritual forces that try to stop the believer from enjoying spiritual resources, symbolized by filling the wells of Isaac with dirt.

As in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Israel, they were ever present and seeking to oppose God's people and their progress.

Gerar = a place of temporary halting, testing and transition during the spiritual journey.

It signifies a space where faith is tested through disputes [symbolized by the wells of strife] and where one moves from human effort to divine reliance.

- A "Halting Place" or Transition: It represents an often uncomfortable, middle ground where patriarchs like Abraham and Isaac paused, reflecting a period of adjustment or testing in one's journey of faith.
- The "Old Mind" or Old Life: Gerar signifies a lower spiritual state or a reliance on old ways of thinking that must be outgrown (or "left") for spiritual maturity and blessing.
- Conflict and Self-Reliance: It is a place where "strife" (struggle over wells) occurs, illustrating the human tendency to rely on personal strength before submitting fully to God's grace.

- Divine Protection in Temptation: Despite the struggles in Gerar, it is a place where God intervenes to keep the faithful from drifting back into the temptation of Egypt, representing God's providential care in difficult times.

In Scripture it marks the meeting point between patriarchal promise and Philistine power, a place where covenant faithfulness is tested, affirmed, and displayed.

It was famously known as a place where the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, resided, encountered conflicts over wells, and established treaties.

The events occurring there emphasize that one must move past the limitations of the "place of dwelling" to find a greater, more secure peace, Beersheba.

Gen. 26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. What will you do when the land gives nothing back? Isaac prepared to go down to Egypt just like his father did. Egypt had food. Egypt had water. Egypt had answers.

Gen. 26:2 But then the voice of the Lord broke through the drought.

Do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. God was calling him not to flee, but to stay, not to grasp for earthly security, but to trust divine provision.

Key Principle: The will of God will never lead you where His grace can't provide for you.

Gen. 26:3 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you.

When God tells you to stay in a dry place, it's not to punish you. It's to reveal that His presence is not dependent on your conditions. The place of famine can still be the place of blessing if God is there. Isaac obeyed. He stayed in Gerar among the Philistines.

We can never successfully run away from trials, because God sees to it that His children learn the lessons of faith regardless of where they go. We can never grow in faith by running from difficulty, because "tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character."

Gen. 26: 3-5 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

Gen. 26:6 Isaac dwelt in Gerar. [Stay in the circumstance]

Gen. 26:7-11 Isaac, fearing for his life during a famine in Gerar, lies that his wife Rebekah is his sister, mirroring his father Abraham's previous actions.

➤ God just pronounced a blessing and he falls to lying because he is afraid.

King Abimelech discovers the truth, rebukes Isaac, and protects them.

➤ Tragic: When the testimony gets so low, the world rebukes the believer.

Then came the miracle. God is rich in mercy to the disobedient Isaac

Gen. 26:12-13 When Isaac planted his crops that year,

he harvested a hundred times more grain than he planted, for the Lord blessed him.

¹³ He became a very rich man, and his wealth continued to grow.

Remember: All of this is taking place in the middle of a famine. To have a hundredfold harvest in the middle of a famine was nothing less than miraculous. It was, without a doubt, the result of God's supernatural power. Even though Isaac had totally blown it through his deceptive behavior, God was gracious to him and continued to be with him and bless him just as He said He would. What a blessing that God's still faithful to us even when we're unfaithful to him.

Key: Sometimes God doesn't remove the famine. He just blesses you right in the middle of it.

Don't wait for the rain to obey.

Isaac & The Water Wars: Gen. 26:15-21 When Your Progress Attracts Envy:

Gen. 26:14b The Philistines became jealous [envious] of him.

Gen. 26:15 So the Philistines filled up all of Isaac's wells with dirt.

These were the wells that had been dug by the servants of his father, Abraham.

The Strategy Of Sabotage The Philistines did something intentional. They stopped the wells. Wells represent access, supply, and sustainability. Cut off his water source. By blocking them, they tried to limit Isaac's progress. Then they pushed him out of the region entirely.

The Philistines closed the wells Abraham had dug out of intense jealousy and to assert dominance over Isaac. By filling the wells with dirt, the Philistines engaged in economic warfare, seeking to disrupt Isaac's livelihood, ruin his grazing land, and force him to leave the region by destroying his essential water supply.

Key: When God's blessing is on you, don't be surprised if it invites resistance.

Favor draws attention, and not all of it is friendly.

Gen. 26:16 Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

➤ God's blessing on Isaac was so great that it sparked fear in the local populace, forcing him to move further into the land that was promised to his family.

Gen. 26:17-18 So Isaac moved away to the Gerar Valley, where he set up their tents and settled down.

Note: The Valley of Gerar still lies inside the promised territory, enabling Isaac to obey both God's word and Abimelech's demand at the same time.

• By staying in the land, Isaac keeps himself under the covenant blessing pronounced in 26:3-4.

He reopened the wells his father had dug, which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham's death. Isaac also restored the names Abraham had given them.

➤ Isaac dug them out again as well as some new wells.

Those wells were inheritance, legacy, life, but they had been filled with dirt.

Covered by the enemy, neglected by time. So he dug again. Not just physically, but spiritually. He reclaimed the promise.

This act not only restores a valuable water source but also connects him to his heritage.

Consider: [All the wells] Our children must begin their own journey and come to a personal relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then they must be allowed to make mistakes so they may come to a more mature faith and trust in the God who has called them.

Gen. 26:19-20 Isaac's servants also dug in the Gerar Valley and discovered a well of fresh running water. ²⁰ But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours."

So he called the name of the well Esek, [contention] because they quarreled with him.

Well Of Contention: First well that must be opened in our walk with God. This is the place where we contend with the enemy; early struggles in our Christian walk. Flesh vs. Spirit

- Most days seem to be a battle. Living for God seems to be a task.
- Discouragement can weigh us down.

Gen. 26:21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. [hatred; root word for Satan; the idea of "laying in wait to ensnare someone".]

Well Of Separation This well relates to enmity between us and the world which hates us so we dig a well of separation. We are stepping out with God by faith; away from our comfort zone.

- Spiritual warfare increases.

Remember God's Promise: Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you...

Gen. 26:22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said,

"For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

The Well of Room The Lord has enlarged us; He will cause us to be fruitful here.

This is a well of maturity; of those who have made it through many struggles. Rehoboth is the place where you get up for another day of struggle, only to find that you have grown to the place where you walk in victory instead of defeat.

Instead of the enemy moving you, you have moved the enemy as you walk in the spirit.

Truth: You can't get to this place without Esek and Sitnah. Many people never reach this place because they give up or burn out in the struggles of opening wells.

Observations:

1. To Isaac these wells were a necessity for survival, but to the Philistines the wells were his claim to the land.
2. Essentially, Isaac refused to stay where there was conflict and hostility.
3. If there had been no hassles in Gerar, he would probably have been content to remain there.
4. Disputes over well ownership FORCED Isaac to move even closer to where God wanted him.
5. The adversity and opposition were divinely ordained and served to guide him to that place.

Isaac moves to the Well of Oath & Rest: Beer-Sheva.

Gen. 26:23 Then he went up from there to Beersheba.

- Symbolically, the movement to Beersheba can also be seen as a representation of spiritual progression and growth.

Gen. 26:24-25 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said,

"I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you.

I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

²⁵ So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Key Points: #1 The same night he moved to Beersheba, in the land of promise, God appeared to him [2nd revelation], calmed his fears and reconfirmed the promises made to Abraham.

#2. God had been guiding him back [through adversity and opposition] to the land of promise to those places where Abraham had walked in fellowship with God.

#3. Often, God allows adversity to move us physically to where He wants us to be. [Acts 17:10] He may move us spiritually to "be mature and complete, not lacking anything." [James 1:4]

#4. God used conflict to deepen Isaac's confidence and dependence upon Him. Growing his faith

#5. The decision was the right one, for God immediately spoke words of reassurance:

#6. Isaac's response: Note the order in which Isaac set up residence in Beersheba.

Previously, he thought he knew God's will by his circumstances:

Dig a well, find sufficient water and no opposition.

Sequence of events is now reversed: Build an altar, worship, pitch his tent. Last, he dug a well.

Consider: Everyday hassles of life are meant to move us closer to the place God wants us - the place of His blessing. Isaac never built an altar until the Lord got him back to Beersheba. When he got there, he built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord.

Consider: Isaac spent much time digging out wells the enemy stopped up. Their desire to overthrow all claim on their land was so intense they would rather fill in a well, an asset of great value in such an arid land, than to allow this claim to remain unchallenged.

Truth: The Enemy hates my wells and knows the "living water" is life to me. The enemy will DAILY look for ways to fill in my wells and do anything to stop the flow of God's Spirit in me.

Open the Wells: You have to be more determined to open the wells than the devil is to fill them in. If you have a great desire for the "living water," you will have a great determination to dig. One of the main reasons for the lack of power in our lives is our desire isn't great enough to put forth the effort it takes to stay abiding in Him. Satan throws a lot of stuff in the well. If you truly want to live in His Presence, Power, and Victory, you MUST empty your well of everything but God and His Word.

Wells were often dug by hand — a labor-intensive and dangerous process. A well provides a life-giving supply of water. Digging one is a costly, emotional act of faith. It's hard labor propelled by the belief that down in that hole the water table waits. Like with many difficult tasks, finding water is terrifically rewarding.

The challenge. What in your life has gone dry? What wells need to be reopened?
Where have you stopped because of conflict or fear? God isn't done with you. The land may look barren. The wells may seem buried. But the living water is still flowing. You just have to dig again.

Lord, you are the source of every good thing. When I'm dry, you remain faithful.
When I'm tired, you give me strength.
I confess I've let wells go dry through fear, disappointment, or distraction.
But today, I choose to dig again.
Not for performance or approval, but because I want to drink deeply of your presence.
Lead me through every Esek and Sitnah until I reach Rehoboth and ultimately, Beersheba.

John 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said,
out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.
Let my life be a spring of living water that refreshes everyone around me.
In Jesus Name. Amen.