

99-04-18a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to James chapter 2. The primary subject of our study this morning is going to be the very famous story from Genesis, if not the most, certainly up there with the most well-known episodes in Genesis, which is the taking of Isaac to the mountaintop to be sacrificed to God. This passage has been a puzzlement, I will tell you it was a puzzlement to me for a long time, because you have an ethical problem with God commanding someone to murder his son. And yet this is held up in the New Testament in a couple of different places as an example of great faith and great obedience, and yet the inherent nature of the command seems to be in opposition to the commandment that says, thou shalt not kill or thou shalt not murder.

And it does present us with something of a dilemma in terms of a conflict that we may discern in what God has told us. God tells us on the one hand, if you take a man's life, then by man your life shall be taken. If you shed blood, then your blood will be shed.

And on the other hand, you have a direct command from God to Abraham to take his son to the mountaintop to be slain. James chapter 2 is one of the passages that mentions this in the New Testament, and the context in which he uses this story as an illustration is going to be central to our study back in Genesis. We'll begin in verse 14 of James chapter 2 for our scripture reading this morning.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? And a better translation here would be, can faith deliver him? Will he be able to stand before God on faith alone if he doesn't have works? This is not a salvation passage. If a brother or sister, obviously the very next phrase tells you we're talking about people in the family of God, a brother or sister in the body of Christ, if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? This is another way of going back to verse 14. If you say, well, I have faith but I've not taken care of this brother or sister's need, can faith alone deliver you? This is with the idea of judgment day.

Verse 17, thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. This is dead in the sense of fruitless. But someone will say, you have faith and I have works.

Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God, you do well, even the demons believe and tremble. But do you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead? In other words, shall I illustrate this for you? Verse 21, was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works and by works faith was made complete? And the scripture was fulfilled which says,

Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now this is one of those cases, at least in my mind, where you have a difficult Old Testament passage. It's mentioned in the New, so you go to the New Testament passage for illumination and you have an equally difficult passage in the New Testament. People have wrestled with James chapter 2. Do you mean that, of course, looking at it from the standpoint of salvation, can faith save him? If there aren't works following faith, then faith is dead, you weren't really saved at all.

This is the common, a common interpretation of James chapter 2. So we are already helped out by our understanding of the use of the term save in the New Testament. That we tend to just flatten and simplify everything in the Bible and say any time you see save, this is salvation from the lake of fire. This is, are you going to suffer eternal damnation or not? But in the simplistic view, James chapter 2 is also a problem passage, isn't it? Because James seems to be saying, well, this faith idea is fine, but if there aren't works as the fruit of faith, then your faith is dead.

You probably weren't ever saved to begin with. And this is where Reformed theology gets the idea of perseverance of the saints. If you are truly saved and you are truly a believer, there will be, there must be, evidence in your life.

There will be some good works that follow. And if someone professes to be saved, but there is no change in their life, there is no manifestation of works that proves their faith is present, then they are a false professor. They are a tare growing amongst the wheat and they are going to be gathered up and burned in the lake of fire forever because they are just a fake Christian.

Well, that is a convenient explanation, but it leaves a lot of difficulties. For one, how can you use language of brother and sister in verse 15? If this person is not saved, then they don't have any brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. And this seems to indicate that works are a component of salvation because your cases where you have people on their deathbed, what about someone who accepts Christ just before they die? Well, they never did have any works, so were they really saved or not? Only God knows.

There was a series of brown bag lunch discussions down at the seminary, meaning that they would have this discussion, everybody would come in and eat their lunch while there was this debate going on. They had a series of arguments back and forth about how much is necessary to prove that you are really saved and is it necessary for others to see this proof because faith without works is dead. Well, because we have covered a

lot of this ground in the past, let me just review and remind all of us that the faith that is in view in most of the New Testament is living faith.

It is your day-by-day faith, your day-by-day decision faith. This is how we are declared righteous or justified, not for salvation, but in the eyes of God as our life-bearing fruit. Are we fulfilling our call? Are we walking the worthy walk? Are we growing and maturing and putting on the new man that is renewed in the image of the Creator? This is what Jesus died to do for us.

It tells us in Galatians 1 that Christ died to deliver us out of this present evil age to save us. Sozo is the very same word from which we get, can faith save him, here in verse 14. So the question is, what is the role of works in the life of believers? We know that it is not a prerequisite for salvation and it is not a proof of salvation.

So what is James really talking about here? He says, there is faith that saves, that is fine. But here we are talking about living faith, daily faith. And that faith, if you say, well I am living by faith day-by-day, but it doesn't come out in your actions, that is a dead faith.

Salvation we are not talking about. We are in the realm of believers, of brothers and sisters. If you say, well I trust God, I believe in God, I am a believer, and I live my life according to the word of God.

But there is no evidence of it in your life. When an opportunity comes to demonstrate compassion or to be self-sacrificial with regard to others, when there is an opportunity to be of service or to reflect divine character in your life, and you don't do that, you do not have the living faith that you profess to have. That supposed faith is dead.

And that is why James says in verse 20, he calls this person a foolish man who claims to have faith or to live by faith, but there is no fruit in the daily life. He says, show me your faith without your works. There is no such thing as living faith if it doesn't come out in what you do.

This is the riddle he poses in verse 18. Someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works.

Living faith is inextricably bound up with and is going to be reflected in daily life, daily decisions, priorities and so forth. But he uses this as the illustration and this is our point here. In verse 21, was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Well, this helps clarify and substantiate the view that we are presenting of this passage because the Bible doesn't say that Abraham was saved on the mountaintop with his knife in the air, does it? This isn't the point at which Abraham was saved.

We've had nine or ten chapters of Abraham's life prior to the episode with Isaac on the mountain. But here James says, Abraham our father was justified by works when he

offered Isaac on the altar. So clearly this justification, this righteousness reflected in works as a manifestation of faith is an illustration of living faith, not saving faith.

So this is one of the ways that James helps to shed light on our passage. Do you see in verse 22 that faith was working together with his works and by works his faith was made complete? This is living faith. Now, if saving faith was in view, then according to James, Abraham wasn't completely saved until he was willing to put Isaac on the altar.

This, by the way, is the substance of lordship salvation. Well, you can profess faith in Christ, but until you make Christ the Lord of your life, until you're willing to put your all on the altar, as the old hymn says, until you make Christ Lord, you're not saved. So it's faith plus something else.

Well, we understand from the word of God that it is faith alone that saves. There's no such thing as an incomplete salvation. Therefore, this whole episode has to do with just what we've discussed.

Living faith, daily faith, daily justification. Salvation here is not in view. Verse 23, the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

If you will recall, that was back in Genesis chapter 17, not Genesis chapter 22. But the outworking of Abraham's faith, living faith, is found here in this episode on the mountaintop. But see, a lot of people go back and say, well, that was the point of Abraham's salvation, is when he believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness back in Genesis 17.

But we've already seen that that's not the case either, because God spoke to Abraham and said, leave Ur of the Chaldees and your kindred and go to the land I will show you. God confirmed the promise three or four times before Genesis 17, where it states that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. So once again, we have the confirmation that the subject and the point of deliverance and justification that we see not only here in James, but also throughout the book of Romans and Galatians and elsewhere in the New Testament, is primarily concerned with how we live our lives after salvation proper.

This is what God is concerned with. But this is why we have the books of the New Testament addressing not evangelism, but how shall we then live once we are saved. Okay, let's turn back to Genesis 22.

We have a little bit to cover in Genesis 21, which we're going to cover briefly because we are going to be revisiting this a little bit later. There's quite a, for lack of a better word, a strange relationship with this passage in Genesis 21 toward the end. The covenant with Abimelech regarding the well of Beersheba and a future episode that we'll see a couple

of chapters forward.

So we're going to cover this rather briefly now and we will revisit it in more detail later. But at the end of chapter 21, you will recall that we've seen the birth of Isaac, the fulfillment of the promises that God made, the expulsion of Ishmael, who in reality is the firstborn son. But as is often the case throughout scripture, you see this idea of reversal.

What would be expected from a human point of view is not what happens in the divine plan, the divine point of view. So the first time you have sons being born, who is the first son ever born in human history? It's Cain. Then you have Abel, who is slain, and then you have Seth, the third son.

But through whom does the heritage and the line of promise descend? Is it through the firstborn son, Cain? It winds up being through Seth. And in the very first family, you have this picture of death and resurrection. And in this, the line of promise, because you have Abel being slain and you have Seth sort of raised up to take his place.

And this is another theme developed early in Genesis. It's going to be a thread that runs throughout the Bible. You see it in the two doves that are a part of the ritual of cleansing for a leper, where the priest is going to come out to the leper and he has two birds.

And he kills one bird, splits it open, spills its blood into a bowl of living water, and then sprinkles the living bird with that blood and water mix and sets it free. And it's a picture of death and resurrection. You see this in Cain and Abel.

But the expectation that Cain as the firstborn is going to inherit and pass on everything that pertains to Adam is upset because it isn't Cain. He winds up being rejected. God makes a covenant with him.

God protects his life. And God, in a sense, blesses him with the mark that preserves his life. But he's a fugitive and a wanderer in a land to the east.

Abraham, we've seen some other intervening examples of this. But here, Abraham, his firstborn son is Ishmael. God makes a covenant with Ishmael.

Ishmael is going to wander as a Bedouin-type lifestyle in a land to the east. Although he's the firstborn son, your expectation is upset. And it is Isaac in whom Abraham's seed will be called.

Throughout the Bible, we're going to have the human expectation upset. Who is the firstborn son of Jacob? Who ought to be the ruling tribe in Israel? Who ought to be the priestly tribe in Israel? The double portion inheritance, the priesthood, and so forth, the rulership, all belongs to the firstborn son. Who's the firstborn son of Jacob? Reuben.

Is Reuben the priestly tribe? No. Is Reuben the ruling tribe? No. Is Reuben the double

portion tribe? No.

All of these expectations are upset. You find this thread. There are dozens of examples we could find in the Old Testament and in the New, culminating in what Jesus says, The last shall be first, the first shall be last.

Jacob and Esau themselves, the elder shall serve the younger. Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. Jacob crosses his hands when he blesses them.

He puts his right hand on the younger son. This is a constant theme throughout the Bible. And in a large sense, and what specifically concerns us is, when you look at the two large groups that constitute the people of God in the Bible, if you just step back and look at the whole big picture, you have essentially Israel in the Old Testament.

You have the church in the New. Which came first? Which is the firstborn people of God? It's Israel. Paul says in Romans, To them belong the covenants and the promises and the law and the oracles of God and all of these things.

They got all of that first. But like these other examples, like these other firstborn sons, they didn't appreciate the position that they occupied. And because of their lack of interest in receiving the things of God, they wind up last rather than first.

And they, like Esau, have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. And yet there are promises to Esau. There are promises to Ishmael.

There are promises to Cain. There are promises to Israel that will eventually be fulfilled. But they have been upset.

And now it is the church through whom God is accomplishing His purpose. And we are going to actually see God face to face first. We are going to enter into the full realm of priesthood first.

God wanted Israel, the entire nation, to be a kingdom of priests. But it is the church who first becomes a kingdom of priests. And that we are the first to taste of the eternal inheritance and so forth.

So this is another case where with the expulsion of Ishmael, we have the foreshadowing and the illustration of this principle. And why does God make this a principle? Why is this pattern so pervasive in Scripture? Because it makes a point. Man looks on the outward appearance.

We look at things from a human perspective. God looks at things from His divine perspective. God looks at the heart, not at the outward appearance.

And He makes a point that it isn't circumstances. It isn't your priority of birth that determines your destiny. It is what you choose.

And over and over again, God says, Look, this younger son would not have inherited, but his heart was toward God and the older son was not. And God will fix circumstances. God will do whatever is necessary to bless those who bless Him.

To honor those who honor Him. And you can be the last son in line. When Samuel comes to visit the sons of Jesse, he looks at the first seven sons and doesn't find what he's looking for.

David is out with the sheep. He's the youngest. He's just slightly above a servant.

But he is the one who is blessed. He's the one who is anointed King of Israel. He's the one through whom Jesus Christ will be descended.

It is no problem for God. With God, all things are possible. God will bless those who have a heart toward Him.

And God makes this point by showing how these seemingly, these decks that are stacked against those who come later or those who are younger or those who have lower priority. This is why God makes such an issue of the widows and orphans and those who are dispossessed. He says the children of the barren woman will be more numerous than of her that had children.

And we're going to see later in Genesis the theme of barrenness and fruitfulness reflected in the four women associated with Jacob. You have Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah. And at different times, different ones of them are barren and don't have children and other ones are barren and they pray to God and one thing and another.

God is looking at the heart. And what we can take out of all of this is don't think that because of circumstances, don't think that because of background, don't think that because of the way things are that God can't bless or that you can't be fruitful. We are limited only by our enthusiasm for the things of God.

To the extent that we dedicate ourselves to God, to the extent that we honor Him, He will honor us. And this fruit that we bear may not be in the visible realm, it may not be in the realm of the measurable in this life, but it is God who sees in secret that will reward openly. It is God who is pleased.

And it is in many cases just as the promises that have been made to Israel don't seem to be fulfilled. Israel has been scattered for 2,000 years. But the nation is regathering, the territory is there, and things are shaping up for the climax and the fulfillment of all the things that God has promised to Israel.

It will not be long until temple worship is resumed in Israel. I can state that as a fact, because the Bible says there is temple worship in Israel in the end times. So it is only a matter of time until that takes place.

And we see more and more things going into shape. I just read a couple of weeks ago that apparently there is this big thing about the ashes of the red heifer that are necessary to rededicate temple worship. Well, because there aren't any red heifers over there, they didn't see how this could take place.

But then they had somebody growing a red heifer. There was a man that felt like this process ought to be accelerated, so he shipped 500 cattle over there, red cows, but it has to be a native-born cow. So these are going to go over there, they are going to breed, then there will be a native-born red heifer, and so on.

Anyway, these things are within the realm of possibility, even from a human perspective now, where for hundreds and thousands of years they have just been a prophetic prospect. God speaks about things that are not as though they are. And we can look at our lives and think, well, we are not.

There is nothing there. We don't have a circle of influence. We are not winning the lost.

We are not taking strongholds for God, and so forth. Just remember this theme of reversal that we are in the middle of here in Genesis. It is those things that seem the weakest where God manifests His glory to the greatest extent.

Those who have been forgiven much, love much. It is in our weakness that God's strength is made manifest. It is the elder who will serve the younger.

The last shall be first. As we resume here in Genesis chapter 21, we saw that Ishmael is expelled. And you think, well, this seems awfully harsh.

Hagar and Ishmael are expelled. But you see the grace of God. It is at God's command, it is a part of God's plan, that Hagar and Ishmael leave the household of Abraham.

We saw last time that this is a legal transaction, as well as a command from God. By granting Hagar and Ishmael freedom, the exchange is they give up any claim on the inheritance of Abraham, which is necessary because God said in Isaac, shall your seed be called. And it is the son with the original and true wife of Abraham that this is going to take place.

And it is, as we've seen, an illustration of the fact that it is not human manipulation. It isn't human subterfuge or human device that brings about the fulfillment of the plan of God. Sarah and Abraham and Hagar work together to produce Ishmael, thinking this will be a way to fulfill God's promise.

God is not going to honor that plan, that outworking, even though it does produce a son. That's not the way God's going to fulfill His plan. He's going to do it in His power, in His time, and He will declare who's going to be the heir.

So this works out. But you will notice that God remedies this mistake that Abraham and Sarah make with Hagar. You would think, well, now this is messed up because this is not the son of promise.

He's the firstborn. What are we going to do now? God works this out. And yet, even though Ishmael is a mistake, God is going to bless him.

He's going to have 12 princes descend from him. And he is preserved and blessed by God. God takes care of him, just as God will take care of any of the outworkings that come from our mistakes.

All things work together for good. And God will actually use this mistake as an illustration. As we've seen, Paul will use this to help illustrate the difference between justification by works and justification by faith.

Are you the son of the bond woman or the son of the free woman? Are you going to try to justify yourself before God by what you do? Or are you going to be justified before God in daily life through faith? The very thing we saw in James 2 this morning. There is an associated idea there that once you are justified by faith, it is going to be reflected in what you do. But there's a priority.

Genesis 17 comes before Genesis 22. Abraham believes God and it's counted to him for righteousness before he climbs the mountain and sacrifices Isaac. You can't have Genesis 22 and you can't have James 2 without Genesis 17.

The faith has to come first. And what we do has to be motivated by faith, not by some human attempt to please or fulfill what God has. Now in chapter 21, we saw all of these things.

In verse 18, Lift up the lad, hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation, God says to Hagar. God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

So God was with the lad and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. And so this is the conclusion for quite some time of the Bible taking any notice of Ishmael or his descendants.

Then in verse 22, the account of Abraham resumes. It came to pass at that time that Abimelech, we remember him, he's the king of Gerar. He's the one that thought Sarah was good looking and single and took her into his household and was getting ready to make her his wife when his household and city state there were struck with a plague.

And he brings Abraham on the carpet, calls him to account. And God talks to Abimelech, not to Abraham, and says, you've done a wrong thing. Abraham has deceived you.

You're going to have to make this right or you will all die. And so Abraham comes in. He prays on behalf of Abimelech and the household is restored.

This is the same man. Abimelech and Thecal, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham saying, God is with you in all that you do. Now, therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring or with my posterity.

Of course, this is not without some cause. Abraham has dealt falsely with Abimelech just a couple of chapters earlier. So he says, swear to me that you won't do that, but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt.

And Abraham said, I will swear. But Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized. And Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing.

You did not tell me nor had I heard of it until today. So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech and the two of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

Then Abimelech asked Abraham, What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves? He said, You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand that they may be my witness that I have dug this well. Therefore he called that place Beersheba because the two of them swore an oath there. Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba.

So Abimelech rose with Phechol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and there called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

This is something of a puzzling passage. We've had things that made pretty good sense up to this point. But we have here the desire expressed by Abimelech to make a perpetual covenant between his household and the household of Abraham.

Abraham says, Fine, I'll do that. But we have this little issue of the well. You guys have seized this.

The word for seized in verse 25 is a strong word that means to take by force. Abimelech says, I didn't know anything about this. Well, the last time there was an issue between Abraham and Abimelech, he said, I didn't know anything about this.

So you get the idea that Abimelech keeps getting blindsided by these issues regarding Abraham. And he says, You didn't tell me. I haven't heard of it until today.

But then they go ahead and make this covenant. And in addition to the normal procedure of the covenant, there are seven ewe lambs, female sheep, young ones, that are set aside and dedicated to be a sign of this sort of special provision of the covenant that regards the well. And because of this, this place is called Beer Sheva.

Beer Sheva. Beer means well. Sheva is a word.

We have, I forget the technical term for it, homonyms, I think, where you have two words that are spelled the same but have different meanings in English, like trunk, trunk of your car, and trunk on an elephant, and trunk, phone, trunk line, that sort of thing. The same word is used for different things. Well, Sheva in Hebrew is not only the word for seven, but also the word for oath.

And so when it says in verse 31, He called that place Beer Sheva because the two of them swore an oath there. They swore a Sheva. They Shevad a Sheva there.

They swore an oath. And yet Sheva is also the word for seven, and it's Shabbat is also where we get Sabbath, which is the seventh day. And all of these are sort of intertwined here, and there's a double entendre in the naming of the well.

There are some features of this account that we're going to save to study in detail later because I want to be sure we get all the way through chapter 22 this morning. And let me just tweak your interest a little bit. Turn over to Genesis chapter 26.

In Genesis chapter 26, we have a couple of problems in this chapter that we will address when we get there. You may notice that in 26, 1 through 11, you have an episode similar to two episodes. We've already discovered in the life of Abraham.

Isaac is going to go to Gerar with Abimelech and say that Rebekah is his sister instead of his wife. Now, we've gotten pretty tired of this whole thing with Abraham, but here Isaac goes to the same place and does the same thing. And this is so suspiciously similar to what happened in Abraham's life that many liberal scholars think that there has been some sort of a misunderstanding, that there was only one episode, but it has been attributed to both Abraham and to Isaac because it's so similar.

We'll address that when we get there. But then look in verse 15. Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth.

And Abimelech said to Isaac, Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we. Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham.

He called them by the names which his father had called them. Also Isaac's servants dug

in the valley and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water is ours.

So he called the name of that well Etzek, because they quarreled with him. That means quarrel in Hebrew. Then they dug another well and they quarreled over that one.

So he called its name Sitna, which means opposition or conflict. Verse 22, 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.

Rehoboth means something like open space, open spaces. Then he went up from there to Beersheba. This is the part that really concerns us here.

Verse 23 and following, Isaac goes up from there, from Rehoboth to Beersheba. 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. 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 another well.

Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzoth, one of his friends, and Phechol, the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, Why have you come to me, since you hate me and sent me away from you? They said, We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you.

Well, shades of chapter 21. That you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now blessed of the Lord.

So he made them a feast. They ate and drank. Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another.

And Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. It came to pass that same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, We have found water. So he called it Sheba.

Therefore, the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. Well, now, why is it called Beersheba? Is it because of Abraham and the oath? Is it because of the seven ewe lambs? Or is it because of Isaac and what it says here in chapter 26? Well, we'll resolve all of that when we get to chapter 26. So, I just give you that as a preview of coming things.

One thing I would like to note about this section of chapter 21 before we pause here to take our break, and that is, this serves a function, this interlude here, this episode, after the departure of Ishmael and before the offering of Isaac in chapter 22, we have this interlude. What does it signify? You will notice that we have the mention of a well of water which is in dispute. It's going to become Beersheba, the well of seven, or the well of the oath.

We have just seen in the preservation of Hagar and Ishmael the mention of water. Hagar's eyes are open and she sees a well of water. She goes and fills a skin and gives her son to drink, and this saves their lives.

We also see that Abimelech, who has appeared earlier as kindly disposed toward Abraham even though he deceives him about his wife, but Abraham intercedes for him and they apparently develop a friendship and Abimelech comes to cement this friendship and to perpetuate a covenant between them that guarantees not only peaceful relations but also the land. In verse 23 it says, According to the kindness I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt. And this is a recognition.

This is the first place where we see someone acknowledging that the land belongs to Abraham. And so we begin to see this is the first sign of the literal fulfillment in Abraham's lifetime of these promises that have been made to him and to his descendants. So even though the focus of God's promise and God's covenant with Abraham is to his seed and his descendants after him, you think, well, what good does that do Abraham? Well, Abraham is getting a foretaste of this, the acknowledgement of the Gentiles, in this case the Philistines, of God's promise to him.

Abimelech says, God is with you. Let there be a covenant. Let's recognize that this land is yours, that this well is yours.

And so Abraham, in his lifetime, is getting a foretaste of these great and grand promises, covenant promises, that God has made to him. Although the bulk and the emphasis of God's promise is future, Abraham is getting a taste of it now. And this episode tells us that specifically.

And this is a pattern that we're going to see in the rest of Scripture, including our own lives. Much of our promise, inheritance, is future. The fulfillment of our salvation is largely future.

You can accept Christ as your Savior today. And tomorrow, things circumstantially are pretty much the same. You don't suddenly find a big chest of gold in your living room.

You don't look outside and see that you're in a heavenly mansion. You've got a resurrection body and sin has been expunged and ultimate sanctification and all these other things. It's largely future.

Our salvation and our standing in Christ, the benefit of that is largely future. But we begin to see, as we progress in the realm of living faith, that we partake of those future promises in the present. And we see this pattern beginning to develop in the life of Abraham.

You see the multiplication of his flocks and herds. You begin to see his son growing to manhood. And you begin to see the fulfillment of the land promise at least a shadow of that in Abraham's lifetime.

And that's one of the main things that this passage serves to do for us here. We also have a foreshadowing here. We've seen some role reversal.

We saw where Abraham was the intercessor for Lot. And yet it is Abimelech who sort of takes on the Abraham role when Abraham fails and God speaks to Abimelech and reveals his plans to Abimelech instead of to Abraham. Abraham finds himself on the other side of the table here where he's the recipient of divine revelation from another kind of like Lot.

Here, Abraham goes to Abimelech and says, I've got this problem here. You're taking something that rightfully belongs to me. You're maintaining possession of something that belongs to me.

Well, this is going to foreshadow a reversal that's going to take place in the next chapter. And we'll see the outworking of this after we pause here and take our break.