

Genesis 21:31-34

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Abraham names the place where he made an oath with Abimelech, “Beersheba.” After the covenant is made, Abraham plants a tree at Beersheba and prays to God.

Abraham and King Abimelech have made a covenant with one another. Abraham vowed to deal honestly with Abimelech, giving him sheep and oxen. He also gives the king seven female sheep to ensure that one of his water wells will be left alone by Abimelech's men.

After making their covenant, Abraham calls the *place* where they are gathered *Beersheba*, because *there the two of them took an oath.* Beersheba means “well of the oath.” Beersheba can also be interpreted as “well of seven,” a reference to the seven gift lambs. The Hebrew words for “seven” and “oath” come from the same root word: “Seba.”

Beersheba is located in the northern Negev and was a landmark for distinguishing the southern boundary of Israel “from Dan to Beersheba” ([Judges 20:1](#); [1 Kings 4:27](#); [Amos 8:14](#)). Beersheba also was a major residence of the patriarchs ([Genesis 22:19](#), [26:33](#), [28:10](#), [46:1,5](#)).

The treaty concludes with a summary, that *they made a covenant at Beersheba*, and afterward *Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines.* The passage ends by saying *Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.* So Abimelech is apparently a Philistine. Beersheba is still a modern city, so its location is known. The distance from Beersheba to the coastal plain that would become the territory of the Philistines is about 20 miles.

The Philistines mentioned here may be the first of “sea people” who arrived in Canaan from the Aegean Sea. The Philistines mentioned in the time of kings Saul and David, who will live about a thousand years later, were of Greek origin from Philistia, with Greek customs and culture. Their ancestors were the Casluhites, sons of Mizraim ([Genesis 10:14](#)). They arrived in Canaan from the Aegean area ([Amos 9:7](#)). For many years these Philistines were Israel’s primary enemy until David effectively stopped them ([2 Samuel 21](#)).

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba. The tamarisk tree is an evergreen with numerous branches possessing very small leaves. It provides good shade and grows 20-30 feet high. Abraham's planting of the tree might have expressed his devotion to dwelling in that land. The fact that a single tree is noted reflects the arid terrain. He might have only planted one because the tree would initially require watering. After planting the tree, Abraham prays to God, calling *on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God*, who was his source of blessing and protection. God used Abimelech to provided protection for a time, but Abraham knew who he could really trust.

In calling *on the name of the Lord*, Abraham shows he is still a man of faith. James says Abraham was called "the friend of God" ([James 2:23](#)), Paul says he was the father of all who believe ([Romans 4:11](#)). Perhaps the narrative mentions this act of worship as an example of walking in faith.

The special name of the *Lord* on whom Abraham calls is El Olam, the Everlasting God who has no beginning and no end. The name El Olam is significant because the covenant with Abraham and his descendants was eternal. Abraham survived the troubles in Gerar as an alien and now enjoys the prosperity that God provides. The chapter concludes by telling us that *Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days*. He is now established in the eyes of the local people and it is known that his God is with him wherever he travels.

Biblical Text:

³¹ Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.