

## Like Father, Like Son

This account is parallel to two similar stories about Abraham (see [Gen 12:10–20](#); [20:1–18](#)). An earlier famine forced Abraham to relocate to Egypt for a while. When in Egypt Abraham was fearful that he would be killed because of Sarah's beauty and fabricates a story to protect his life. In typical human fashion the son follows his father's example of lying to avoid problems. The appearance of similar events reported in a similar way underscores the fact that the blessing has now passed to Isaac, even if he fails as his father did. The difference in this story of Isaac is that Abimelek (king of the Philistines) never actually takes Rebekah as Sarah was taken. The lie of Isaac is not discovered by divine revelation, but by an observation of Isaac's intimate interaction with Rebekah.<sup>1</sup>

God confirms Isaac's status as the recipient of the covenant promise God made to Abraham by appearing to him. God confirms His covenant to Isaac because of his father's obedience and is contingent upon Isaac's obedience to His commandments, statutes, and laws.

Some scholars argue that this story could only have been written after the law was given (C. Westermann, Genesis, 2:424–25). But the simplest explanation is that the narrator (traditionally taken to be Moses the Lawgiver) elaborated on the simple report of Abraham's obedience by using terms with which the Israelites were familiar. In this way he depicts Abraham as the model of obedience to God's commands, whose example Israel should follow.<sup>2</sup>

### Observation

1. What did God tell Isaac when He appeared to him? ([Genesis 26:2-6](#))
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What was Isaac's lapse in memory and why do you think Issac forgot? ([Genesis 26:7-9](#))
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What was ruling over Isaac's mind and heart? ([Genesis 26: 7-9](#))

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition Notes (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), [Ge 26:5](#).

4. Considering the entire chapter, did God ever "tell" Isaac where He wanted him to live?  
([Genesis 26:2](#))

### **Interpretation**

5. How does the story of Isaac illustrate the theme of obedience in our walk with God?

6. What significance do you think the reaffirmation of God's covenant with Isaac holds for readers of the Bible?

7. In what ways do you see God's presence and prompting in the lives of the characters in [Genesis 26](#)?

9. Considering the meaning behind the names of the wells: **Beer Sheba** - an oath'; and 'the well of the oath,' what may we learn from the wells that Isaac dug? (**Esek** = *contention*; **Sitnah** = *strife or enmity*)

## Application

10. What does the conflict over wells represent in our modern lives, and how can we manage similar conflicts with grace?

## A Word on Wells

WELL (בְּאֵר, be'er; φρέαρ, phrear). A deep man-made reservoir dug or drilled in the ground, often walled with stone or plaster. Used to access groundwater.

### Introduction

Wells were one of the most common sources of water in a region largely dependent on rainwater. The Middle East has only a few rivers that flow year-round, and rain only falls from October to April. Wells provided the water necessary to survive the dry months (May—September). The need for wells separated the Middle East from neighboring lands ([Deut 11:10-11](#)).

As a key source of water, wells were essential for life. Wells were one of several methods of water collection in the arid ancient Near East, along with cisterns, conduits, dams, pools, reservoirs, spring houses, terraces, tunnels, etc. Wells and cisterns could be hewed out of rock (usually limestone) or earthen clay. Wells were narrow at the top and expanded under the surface. The inside of the hole was then lined with rock, brick, or plaster, and the opening covered with a large rock to keep the water cool and clean as well as to regulate use ([Gen 29:1-3, 7-8](#); Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 8.1.1-6; Pliny, *Natural History* 31.26.43-28.49). Shade kept the water cool, and circulation occurring naturally or as the result of drawing water kept it fresh. The presence of a wood or stone cover indicated a fixed wellhead (a stone wall or other structure erected around the opening; compare [Gen 29:1-3](#); [2 Sam 17:18](#)). Spring, stream, or rainwater could then be collected, either as runoff or seep from the earth, and stored.

Wells in the ancient Near East could be up to 144 feet deep (44 meters; compare [John 4:11](#)), and were often accessed by means of some kind of lifting device. Shallow wells had steps cut into the wall that led down to the water. Water was transported by clay jar, waterskin, or bucket ([Gen 21:19](#); [24:20](#); Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.37).

Well water was not as pure as spring water but was still considered to be of high quality ([Jer 6:7](#); Pliny, Natural History 31.23.38–39). Well water was used for drinking or watering livestock, rather than irrigation. Often a trough was cut nearby, usually in wood or stone, to aid in watering livestock (compare [Gen 24:20](#); [30:38](#); [Exod 2:15–16](#)). In extended periods of drought, wells could dry up ([Jer 14:3](#); [51:36](#); [Hos 13:15](#)), and wells not cared for could lose their water ([Jer 2:13](#)). A broken well was worthless ([Jer 2:13](#); compare [Jer 14:3](#)).

### **Wells in the Ancient Near East**

Wells in the ancient Near East were located near towns as well as in wilderness and desert areas. Drawing well water was a task for women and was difficult work ([Gen 24:11, 26](#); compare the woman's desire for "living water" in [John 4:6–15](#)). Digging one's own or owning a well was a sign of prosperity ([2 Chr 26:10](#)). Later, wells were dug around private homes ([2 Sam 17:18](#); compare [Prov 5:15–17](#)). Symbolically naming wells was a common practice ([Gen 16:14](#)), and the names of many settlements arose from the name of their well (compare [Gen 21:31](#); [Num 21:16](#); [Isa 15:8](#)).

As a limited resource, wells were a vital social and economic asset. Disputes over them were common ([Gen 21:25](#); [26:17](#)). Abraham asked Abimelech to swear an oath over Abraham's well as a witness of ownership ([Gen 21:30–31](#)). Enemies could target wells before open hostilities ([Gen 26:15](#)). Israel pledged not to drink from the wells of Edom if they would be allowed to pass through their land ([Num 20:17](#)), and then offered to pay for their use ([Num 20:19](#); compare [Deut 2:27–28](#)). In the times of the kings, the digging of wells was a royal responsibility ([2 Chr 26:10](#)), and campaigning armies might dig their own ([2 Kgs 19:24](#); [Isa 37:25](#)).

The use of wells and other water infrastructure was regulated by law. This included principles of ownership, access, and maintenance. For example, lack of use could negate one's claim to ownership ([Gen 26:18–22](#)). Urinating or vomiting into a well was a sin against the Sumerian gods and society as a whole (Iwry, "The Curse ...," 228). Wells that had been filled in could be re-dug and reused ([Gen 26:18](#)).

Wells could be dangerous (see [Prov 23:27](#)). The Torah mandated the covering of wells or pits to prevent injury ([Exod 21:33](#)). To defend his teaching on the Sabbath, Jesus asks the crowd, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ([Luke 14:5](#) ESV). Wells were used in Scripture as hiding places ([1 Sam 13:6](#); [2 Sam 17:18](#)). At times they were also used as prisons ([Gen 37:20, 22, 24–28](#)). Depending on the well, the bottom was generally either several feet of mud and dirty water or dust powder. Prisoners could die by sinking ([Jer 38:6](#)). Polluted wells were well-known and created a great danger among the populace ([Prov 25:26](#); Iwry, "The Curse ..." 228.)

### **Wells in the Lives of God's People**

Wells played an important role in the story of God's people. In Scripture, inanimate objects often play a role in the narrative (e.g., the land, the Jordan River, or the temple), and wells make a frequent appearance, especially in the Pentateuch. They served as a place of rest and refreshment in a dry land. Wells just outside a city or village served as a meeting place for local women but also for travelers, where news would be passed along ([1 Sam 9:11](#); compare [1 Sam 19:22](#)). In Scripture a number of important meetings take place at a well, including the meeting of a future wife (three times: Abraham's servant and Rebekah, [Gen 24:11](#); Jacob and Rachel, [Gen 29:3](#); Moses and Zipporah, [Exod 2:15](#); see also the angel of the Lord and Hagar, [Gen 16:14](#); Jesus and the Samaritan woman, [John 4:1–45](#)).

### **Wells and the Covenant**

Wells play a significant role as an image of God's provision (e.g., [Judg 15:18-19](#); [Deut 6:11](#); compare [Neh 9:25](#)). Wells stood symbolically for the land ([Gen 26:22](#)). They were permanent features of the land. A well and its water were symbols of God's promise and His care. David's men risked their lives to bring David a drink from the well in Bethlehem ([1 Sam 15-16](#); compare [1 Chr 11:17-18](#)). Israel gathered to sing a song of praise for a well God had given them ([Num 21:17-18](#)): "Spring up, O well.—Sing to it.—the well that the princes made, that the nobles of the people dug, with the scepter and with their staffs" (ESV). Pseudo-Philo described God Himself as a well in God's provision of water at Massah and Meribah at the beginning and end of Israel's wilderness wanderings (Liber Antiquitatem Biblicarum 10:7; 11:15; 20:8; compare [Exod 17](#); [Num 20](#)). Paul uses a similar argument in reference to the work of Christ ([1 Cor 10:4](#); compare [Neh 9:11-20](#); [Pss 78:12-35](#); [105:39-41](#)).

### **Metaphorical Usage**

At Qumran, the well and water were understood allegorically as God's law and the faithful followers, respectively (CD 6:2-11). As an image in common life, wells were pictures of physical beauty ([Song 4:15](#)). Likewise, a dry or broken well served as a metaphor for disobedience. Because wells were the primary source of water, a dry well was a curse ([Jer 14:3](#)). They could be used as an image for faithlessness or disobedience ([Jer 2:13](#); compare [Prov 25:26](#)). A well could also serve as a metaphor for death ([Pss 55:23](#); [69:15](#); compare [Rev 9:1](#)).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert G. Rayburn II, "Well," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).