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ABRAHAM PART 30
THE OATH AND THE GROVE

In Genesis 20 we saw how Abraham and Sarah moved to Philistia where Abimelech was king. They deceived him about Sarah's marital status causing much grief. Abimelech rebuked them both and sent them away. He gave them a "peace offering" of herds and servants.

In Genesis 20:22-34 we now see Abimelech seeking out Abraham to secure the peace. Abraham was still living in Philistia although distanced from Abimelech who desired no trouble with a wealthy and powerful Abraham.

After settling a dispute over a water well, they made a covenant of peace generationally between them and their heirs. The place where this was done was named Beer-Sheba by Abraham. "Beer" meant "well," and "Sheba" meant "seven" or "oath." Beer-Sheba then could mean "well of seven" or the "seventh well." It could also mean "well of the oath" as this was the well where they swore an oath of covenant.

There is no indication that Abraham sought God about making an oath or covenant. However, there was peace generationally during the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Abimelech had requested it for three generations. Nevertheless, when those generations passed, and after Israel left Egypt and the wilderness, and they occupied Canaan the Philistines sorely afflicted Israel for many years.

Another interesting matter is seen in Genesis 21:33 as Abraham "planted a grove" and called upon the name of the Lord. The pagans of that time, and for many centuries later, planted "groves" for their places of worship. Abraham appears to have followed that custom for a place of worship to his God.

These were called "groves" because pedestals resembling the trunk of a tree were erected and an altar or graven image was placed on top of it. People would then worship their god there. God wanted nothing to do with such a practice since it resembled the idolatrous practices. That is why in the Law of Moses this practice was prohibited. Deuteronomy 16:21 says, ***"Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee."***

In fairness to Abraham, the Law of Moses (Deut. 16:21) was not yet given, being yet about 500 years away. Genesis 21:33 does make it clear that it was done as unto Abraham's God, Jehovah (Yahweh), the "everlasting God." It is in this verse that God is identified by two names, not just one. First is YHWH, written as LORD, Jehovah, Yahweh, YHWH, or Jehoshua.

The second name used here is El Olam, translated as "the everlasting God." The Hebrew word "Olam" means the secret or "hidden" things. This might have been a name for God to which

Abimelech could more easily relate since Yahweh, the Everlasting One, had been hidden from his understanding. I know of no other place where the name of "El Olam" is used for God.

Abraham built this grove in a part of Philistia that he re-named Beer-Sheba, and he lived there. Centuries later Beer-Sheba became the southernmost part of Israel, a country which did not yet exist. It became part of God's promised land.