

The Treaty Before the Test

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On Friday 30 October 2026 the sixth aliyah of Vayera closes at Be'er Sheva. Avraham and Avimelech swear an oath, seven ewes are set apart as a witness, and two neighbors go home with an agreement. On Shabbat we read the next words: "וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת" "וַיְבָרֶכֶם", "And it came to pass after these things, that G-d tested Avraham."

After which things?

The Rashbam's rule

The Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, sets a rule. Wherever the Torah says "after these things," it is joined to the section right above it. He brings examples. After Avram defeated the kings, G-d told him, "Fear not." After Mordechai reported Bigtan and Teresh, Achashverosh promoted Haman, and the rescue of the king in the end saved Mordechai.

Then he applies the rule here: "אֵף כֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁכָּרַת אַבְרָהָם בְּרִית לְאִבְימֶלֶךְ לוֹ וּלְנִינּוֹ" "וַיְבָרֶכֶם" וְנִתַּן לוֹ שֶׁבַע בְּשׂוֹת הָצֹאן וְחָרָה אִפּוֹ שֶׁל הַקֵּב"ה עַל זֹאת, שֶׁהָרִי אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים נִיתַן לְאִבְרָהָם וְגַם בִּיהוֹשֻׁעַ מִטִּילִים עַל עֲרֵי חֲמֶשֶׁת סָרְנֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים גּוֹרֵל בְּכָלל גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל."

Avraham bound his son and grandson to a pact with Avimelech and gave him seven ewes, and G-d was angry. The land of the Plishtim had been given to Avraham, and in Yehoshua's day lots were cast for the cities of the five Plishti lords as part of Israel's border.

"See what your covenant was worth"

The Rashbam reads "וַהֲאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה" in the same light: "קִנְתָּרוֹ וְצִעְרוֹ", He provoked him and pained him. Then he puts words in G-d's mouth: "נִתְגַּאֲיְתָה בְּבֶן שְׁנַתַּחֲתִי לְךָ לְכָרוֹת בְּרִית" "וְבִינֵיכֶם וּבֵין בְּנֵיהֶם. וְעַתָּה לְךָ וְהַעֲלֵהוּ לְעוֹלָה וְרָאָה מֶה הוּעִילָה בְּרִיתוֹת בְּרִית שֶׁלךְ"

"You took pride in the son I gave you, enough to make a covenant between you and their children. Now go and offer him up, and see what your covenant was worth."

He adds that he later found the same idea in Midrash Shmuel. G-d said, "אֵת נָחַת לוֹ שֶׁבַע בְּשׂוֹת", "חִיֶּיךָ, שְׁבָנִי עוֹשִׂים שֶׁבַע מַלְחָמוֹת עִם בְּנֶיךָ וְנוֹצְחִיךָ אוֹתָן" You gave him seven ewes; by your life, his children will fight seven wars with yours and defeat them. Other versions in the same passage say seven righteous men would fall, Shimshon, Chofni and Pinchas, Shaul and his three sons; or that seven sanctuaries would be destroyed; or that the Ark would wander seven months in the field of the Plishtim.

His view, not the only view

This is a hard reading, and it is the Rashbam's own. Rashi, quoting the Gemara, hears "after these things" as after the words of the Satan or of Yishmael. The Radak ties the Akeida to the Avimelech chapter too, but as a marker of time, with no rebuke at all. A reader should hold the Rashbam's view as one strong voice in the room. Paper 4 in this set gives the others their full say.

Still, the Rashbam saw something in the text. Avimelech asked for an oath "לִי וּלְנִינִי וּלְנֶכְדִי" (21:23), for me, my son and my grandson. Avraham said, "אֶשְׁבַּע", I will swear. He promised for people not yet born, over a land G-d had already promised to those same people.

The questions it leaves us

Israel has signed agreements with neighbors and weighs others today. The Rashbam does not hand us a policy, and this paper does not argue for one. He hands us questions.

Is every agreement over the land the treaty at Be'er Sheva? Or does the Torah also know agreements that are wisdom and peace, and how would we tell them apart?

Who is bound? Avraham swore for his grandson. How should one generation weigh a promise that binds the next, about land the next has its own claim to?

Where is the danger in the Rashbam's eyes: in the agreement, or in the pride he names, "נְתֻמְאִיתָהּ בְּבֶן", the feeling that our own arrangements secure our children's future?

And what does ה' ask in return? At the end of the Akeida ה' swears His own oath (22:16): "בִּי הִנֵּנִי כְּשֶׁבַעְתִּי לְנֶאֱמָר ה'". One oath was made with a neighbor; the other came from Heaven. A people that makes agreements has to decide which of the two it leans on.

These are questions for every reader across the spectrum, and the Torah asks them before any of us do.

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Sources (fetched from Sefaria 30 October 2026): Rashbam on Genesis 22:1; Genesis 21:22–34; Genesis 22:1, 22:16; Rashi on Genesis 22:1; Radak on Genesis 22:1. Not checked in the original: Midrash Shmuel (quoted only via Rashbam); the Yehoshua passage the Rashbam alludes to.

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