

# Genesis 21:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?

## Analysis

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**And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?...** This passage is part of the Abrahamic narratives which shift from universal human history to God's particular covenant people. The Abraham cycle (Genesis 12-25) demonstrates God's sovereign election, covenant faithfulness, and the development of faith through testing and promise fulfillment.

Central themes include God's unconditional covenant promises (land, descendants, blessing to nations), the call to faith and obedience, the testing of faith through delays and impossibilities, the contrast between divine promises and human schemes, and God's gracious persistence despite human failures. Abraham emerges as the father of faith whose trust in God's promises becomes the model for all believers (Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11).

Theologically, these narratives establish:

1. salvation by grace through faith rather than works
2. covenant as God's gracious initiative binding Himself to His people
3. the necessity of patient trust when promises seem impossible
4. the consequences of attempting to fulfill God's promises through human effort
5. the pattern of divine testing producing mature faith.

The Abraham cycle foreshadows Christ as the ultimate seed through whom blessing extends to all nations (Galatians 3:16).

## Historical Context

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The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

## Related Passages

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**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. What theological truths about Isaac's Birth emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

## Interlinear Text

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|                  |                      |        |                            |            |       |                         |
|------------------|----------------------|--------|----------------------------|------------|-------|-------------------------|
| וַיֹּאמֶר        | אֲבִימֶלֶךְ          | אֶל    | אַבְרָהָם                  | מֵה        | זֶה   | שֶׁבַע                  |
| <b>said</b>      | <b>And Abimelech</b> | H413   | <b>unto Abraham</b>        | H4100      | H2007 | <b>mean these seven</b> |
| H559             | H40                  |        | H85                        |            |       | H7651                   |
| <hr/>            |                      |        |                            |            |       |                         |
| כְּבִשְׂתֵי      | הָאֵלֶּה             | אֲשֶׁר | הָצַבְתָּ                  | לְבִדְוֶה: |       |                         |
| <b>ewe lambs</b> | H428                 | H834   | <b>which thou hast set</b> | H905       |       |                         |
| H3535            |                      |        | H5324                      |            |       |                         |

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