

## Genesis, Part 25

In our previous session, we saw the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob. Esau emerged from the womb first followed closely by his brother Jacob clutching Esau's heel. Esau was the firstborn and, by tradition, the elder of the pair. As such, he was entitled to the rights and privileges of the firstborn, that of being the head of the household and the family priest as well as getting a double portion of any inheritance. But as he grew older, he showed no interest in that birthright. Instead, he much preferred the life of an outdoorsman spending his days hunting. Jacob, however, was more of a homebody and preferred things spiritual. Esau was preferred by his father Isaac for the wild game he brought home, while Jacob was the favorite of his mother Rebekah.

One day when Esau came home pleading to be famished to the point of death, his brother had cooked a fine red stew that Esau immediately lusted after, demanding some lest he "die of his hunger". Jacob saw his chance, and knowing that Esau did not value his birthright as firstborn, he bargained for it with his stew. Esau went for the deal and traded his "useless to him" birthright for a bowl of stew. Esau, "the red man," was overcome by his physical appetite for red stew (Gen 25:30) and sold his birthright. Jacob, "the heel-grabber," cunningly overtook his brother and gained the birthright. Now, we will see how that plays out.

Isaac was overshadowed by his father and his sons. Outside this chapter, there is not much about him. Here we have a collection of snapshots from his life, illustrating how, despite his timidity and moral shortcomings, Isaac received extraordinary promises and experienced extraordinary blessings that in some respects outshone even Abraham's.

**Gen 26:1** Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.

A severe famine forced Isaac to consider a move from his long-time home at Beer-lahai-roi. What was he to think? Here he is in the right place, the

land, and his God introduces a famine in there. What does Isaac do? Go to Egypt?

His father Abraham had also experienced a famine in the land and went “down to Egypt” to escape it. That turned out to be an act of disobedience on his part. God had told him to go to a place He would show him, the land of Canaan, not Egypt. Like his father Abraham, Isaac was making the same mistake his father made by going to Egypt. If God puts you somewhere, He is obliged to support you there. Isaac made his way southward. His intended destination was Egypt, but the Lord “appeared” to him and warned him not to leave the area. This was the first recorded revelation to Isaac.

The Abimelech who ruled this region at this time is no doubt a son or grandson of the Abimelech with whom Abraham made a covenant many years earlier (cf. 21:22–31).

**Gen 26:3** Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you.” Implied was, “Don’t sojourn in this land, and I will NOT be with you.” Generally, the son makes the same mistakes as the father, and that is likely because the son inherits the characteristics, weaknesses, and strengths, of the father’s sin nature. The Lord warns Isaac not to do what his father had done but to remain in the land and then reiterates the covenant He made with his father Abraham, “I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father” (v. 3). The Lord tells him he will multiply his seed and give them the land, and in that process, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. That last part, of course, speaks of the savior, Jesus Christ, coming from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In that person, all the world will be blessed.

Implied again, “BUT! You need to obey and remain IN this land I have given you.”

**Gen 26:5** because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

At this point, God had not given the Mosaic Law, nor was there even yet an Israel to give it to, thus, Abraham was not then under the Mosaic system. However, when God told Abraham to do something, he believed God and acted upon it. That demonstrates faith by his actions. In the New Testament book of James, it is made clear that faith must be followed by action, and that action is the proof of the existence of that faith.

**Rom 4:3** For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

Faith is something you act on. Abraham believed God, he went where God told him to go, and God counted it to him for righteousness. God is telling Isaac that he needs to be like his father and act on his faith.

**Gen 26:6** So Isaac settled in Gerar.

Gerar is to the south in the land that would become Israel. Abraham and Isaac both lived mainly in the southern part of the land.

**Gen 26:7** When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive.

And here we go again. Isaac commits the same sin as his father. Rebekah caught the eye of some of the local Philistines who inquired of Isaac about her. He should not have been worried about this because God told him to stay there in the land, therefore, God was self-obligated to protect and sustain them there. Furthermore, he had the experience of his father to refer to. His father was chastised for doing this same thing. Surely Isaac knew of the incident and should have remembered it. But he gave in to doubt and lied about her status.

There is one difference here with the actions of Isaac. With Abraham, he told only half a lie because his wife Sarah was indeed his half-sister. For Isaac, however, Rebekah was not his half-sister. In the end, a lie is a lie and the act of lying in these two incidences demonstrates a lack of faith in the promises of God.

**Gen 26:8** When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.

Abimelech looks out his window and sees Isaac and Rebekah “laughing” together. When you consider the conclusions that Abimelech drew from this (v. 9), you must assume the word means a lot more than just sharing a joke. The word for “laughing” in Hebrew means to jest, play, make sport, mock, toy with. What Abimelech saw was probably quite physical, certainly physical enough that some translate what was happening was that Isaac was “caressing” Rebekah in such a manner that it immediately identified Rebekah as Isaac’s wife. And since it identified Rebekah as Isaac’s wife, it became obvious that Isaac had lied and “made a mockery” of Abimelech, something he was much displeased about.

The interesting thing is the wordplay on Isaac’s name. After deceiving Abimelech into thinking Rebekah was his sister, Isaac was seen caressing her (meṣaḥēq, v. 8). This participle is a play on the name Isaac (yiṣḥāq), but it also reminds one of Ishmael’s mockery (meṣaḥēq, 21:9). The choice of words is interesting. It is as if Moses was writing that Isaac’s lapse of faith—going to Gerar and calling his wife his sister—made a mockery of the great promise embodied in his name. “Caressing” his wife, Isaac also made a mockery of Abimelech. Isaac should have taken more seriously the covenant promises just given.

So Isaac, like Abraham, received God’s great promise, but in fear, he deceived Abimelech and made a mockery of the promised blessing. Fear mocks faith; faith boldly laughs in triumph. But a person who truly believes God’s promises obeys His statutes, precepts, and commands.

**Gen 26:9** So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister’?” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’”<sup>10</sup> Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.”

Abimelech calls down Isaac. He knew she was his wife and not his sister, as claimed. Isaac gives the same lame excuse that his father gave many years before about fearing for his life because of his beautiful wife. As previously mentioned, evidently the Canaanites had a reverence for marriage not understood by Isaac even though he had been living among them for many years.

**Gen 26:11** So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

Abimelech immediately decreed protection for Isaac, and Isaac enjoyed the respect of the community because of that. It is sad to note that unbelieving Abimelech is more concerned for the well-being of Rebekah than was her believer husband. Glaring failures of faith aside, both seemed to be outstanding men. That may not seem to be the case with Isaac later in our story.

**Gen 26:12** And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him,

“Sowed” and “reaped a hundredfold” captures the idea of the prosperity of his herds of sheep and cattle as well as the planting and harvesting of any crops. Isaac is greatly blessed by the Lord. But notice that his blessings are earthly. We will see these earthly blessings whenever Isaac and the other patriarchs are in the land and walking in fellowship with the Lord. These blessings are later stated in association with the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy. And as we see here, in Deuteronomy great blessings are promised to the Israelites when they are obedient and walking with God, and great discipline when they are not obedient and walking with God.

The blessings promised to the Church, however, are all spiritual, but they are on the same terms as those promised to the patriarchs and later Israel under the Law. If we will permit Him, the Lord wants to bless us abundantly in our spiritual lives, but the prerequisite is a walk of faith and obedience. Today we call that “being in fellowship” as opposed to being in a condition of carnality—disobedient with unconfessed sins on our souls.

**Gen 26:13** and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.

The Scripture makes it clear that Isaac was a very great man, extremely wealthy, and much blessed by God. Previously we have seen that Isaac didn’t always look all that “great” when he was repeating the same weaknesses and sins of his father. But here where he is supposed to be, the Word of God makes it clear that Isaac was indeed a very great man in the land and abundantly blessed by God.

**Gen 26:14** He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants so that the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup> (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) <sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.” <sup>17</sup> So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.

Like his father before him, Isaac had accumulated much wealth in herds, flocks, and many servants to attend to his wealth. The Philistines couldn’t stand to see all his wealth and blessings. I think we can safely assume that those Philistines around Isaac were not nearly as prosperous, thus they became envious of him and feared his prosperity and growth in servants to manage his many herds, flocks, and fields. They feared the power he had accumulated, and Abimelech told him to go away. So Isaac took his entourage and wealth and moved to the nearby Valley of Gerar.

**Gen 26:18** And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. <sup>19</sup> But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found

there a well of spring water, <sup>20</sup> the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. <sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. <sup>22</sup> And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Driven away by the Philistines, Isaac encamped in the Valley of Gerar and continued his search for water. He faced opposition there too. He reopened the wells dug a century earlier by his father, and gave them the same names his father had given them. The local Philistines filled in all the wells his father had dug in an attempt to drive him out. This is the first mention of the enmity of the Philistines which eventually led to continual warfare later in the days of David.

Water was scarce in this land, and wells were of great value. Neither man nor beast can survive long, much less prosper, without good water. The emphasis on water here is both physical and spiritual. "Living water" is associated with the Word. This living water brings life to the one who drinks of it. It is the only "water" that will satisfy your thirst for knowledge. It is also water for washing. Jesus says we are cleansed through the Word He has spoken. There is a great difference demonstrated in the lives of those who drink this "water"—that is study the Word of God. But there will be a struggle if you do "drink it," a price to pay if you are going to study the Word of God. The Devil will resist your efforts and do anything except allow you to get into the Word and drink that "Water". The Philistines were attempting to drive Isaac away. And much like Satan does with believers studying the Word, these Philistines focused on denying Isaac access to the water to render him less of a threat.

The names he gave the three wells reflect not only Isaac's struggle but also his triumph: Esek ("dispute") and Sitnah ("opposition") reflect the conflict over two wells, and Rehoboth, which means "there is room for us," represents the room provided by the Lord.

Isaac refused to fight back. He continued to relinquish one well after another until the Philistines in frustration let him alone. This certainly reveals Isaac as a man of peace and a man of patience. Undeterred by opposition, he persisted, a lesson for us to consider regarding our faithfulness to the Word in the face of resistance.

**Gen 26:23** From there he went up to Beersheba. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.” <sup>25</sup> So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

Isaac finally moves to the vicinity of Beersheba and settles there. And the Lord appeared to him to reassure him that no matter what others may do, the God of Abraham his father will bless him and multiply his offspring for “Abraham’s sake”—that is because the Lord has previously promised Abraham and his seed all these things.

Isaac pitches his tent there and digs yet another well, but more importantly, he builds an altar to worship the Lord.

**Gen 26:26** When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, <sup>27</sup> Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” <sup>28</sup> They said, “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, <sup>29</sup> that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.” <sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

Abimelech fears Isaac because of his relationship with the Lord. He says, “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you” (v. 28). He and two chief officers have come to Beersheba to negotiate a treaty with Isaac similar to



the earlier treaty with Abraham. The king did not wish to be on bad terms with one so obviously blessed by God. Isaac indicated his interest in discussing a formal treaty with these neighbors by ordering a feast to be prepared. Early in the morning, the two men swore an oath to one another, and Abimelech departed in peace. When men get in the right relationship with the Lord, their relationship with their neighbors often improves

**Gen 26:32** That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." <sup>33</sup> He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

On the very day, Isaac entered the covenant with Abimelech, his servants reported finding water in the well they were digging. Isaac called the well Shibah ("oath" or "seven") thus reemphasizing the name given to that spot long before by Abraham. Beersheba ("well of the oath") remains the name of that spot even to this day.

The well yielding sweet water on the same day as the treaty is a signal blessing on Isaac. He has maintained his relationship with the Lord and followed His providential leading, as He placed Isaac in the land exactly where He wanted him to be, and Isaac is in "right relationship" with Him.

**Gen 26:24** When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, <sup>35</sup> and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

When Isaac was one hundred, Esau, who was then forty, married two Hittite women. This is further confirmation of the lack of spiritual values in Esau. Verse 35 says Esau's marriages to these two Hittite women made life bitter for both Isaac and Rebekah. Exactly how is not stated. Perhaps they wanted more and better for Esau? We're not told if the source of their pain was the fact that Esau married Canaanites, unlike his father, or if it was simply that these marriages were in themselves full of pain and grief. Certainly, there were good reasons for God's people not to intermarry with the Canaanites; those reasons are spiritual, not racial. Isaac's father, Abraham, went to great lengths to ensure his son did not marry among the idol-worshiping people of this region (Genesis 24). Later, God will forbid

these relationships outright, specifically because of the evil habits of this culture as seen in Deuteronomy 7:1–4 and 18:9–14.

### **Learnings**

The big lesson for us here in Chapter 26 is that as long as Isaac was away from Canaan, he would have conflict, but when he went back to Beersheba (“the well of the oath”), God met him and gave him peace with the enemy.

**Prov. 16:7** When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.