

DHW

BOOK OF GENESIS

LESSON 19

CHAPTER 26

INTRODUCTION

This chapter features the life of Isaac. Nothing much is written about him in contrast to the things which were written in Genesis about Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. Once again God demonstrated that He is faithful to His promises. God's covenant promise was renewed for each generation. He will intervene so that His plans and purposes are not thwarted by man. On the other hand, man sometimes fails to trust Him and chooses to do things his own way resulting in embarrassing or damaging situations. We will learn that obedience to God's commands is an essential factor for God to bless His people. Isaac was blessed because he obeyed God.

The situation recorded here was almost a parallel to Abraham's escape to Egypt from famine and his encounter with Pharaoh and later in Gerar with Abimelech (12:10-20; 20:1-18). Some critics think that the Abraham's experience in Gerar and that of Isaac's

were the same event repeated twice. But a comparison of the differences of these two instances will show that such thinking has no grounds. The divine author distinguishes that they were separate instances – *And there was famine in the land beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham* (underscore mine, 26:1). Famine was a perennial weather occurrence in the land. The encounters of Abraham and that of Isaac were about one hundred years apart. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, did not take Rebekah to be his concubine, whereas in the case of Sarah, she was taken. Isaac's deception was observed and discovered by Abimelech himself without divine intervention.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

- 1) The LORD rehearsed His covenant promises with Isaac (26:1-5);
- 2) Isaac obeyed God and stayed in Gerar (26:6-11);
- 3) The LORD blessed Isaac (26:12-16);
- 4) The LORD assured Isaac of His presence (26:17-25);
- 5) Abimelech made a covenant with Isaac (26:26-35)

This preserved narrative of the life of Isaac contains some valuable lessons for our spiritual benefits.

STUDY THE WORD

The LORD Rehearses His Covenant Promises with Isaac

A famine broke out in Canaan. It was not unusual for famine to occur in the land. It happened before in the time of Abraham (12:10). The phrase (26:1b) *beside the first famine* clearly indicates that this incident was a separate one in Abraham's time. Isaac went to the land of Philistines to the city of Gerar. This land was at the border between Canaan and Egypt. The LORD appeared to Isaac in a vision (*theophany* = an appearance of God). The LORD instructed Isaac not to go to Egypt and commanded him to stay in the land. The LORD then reaffirmed His covenant blessings and promises which He made with Abraham, his father. God assured that He would be with him, He would bless him, He would give the land in which he lived to his *seed*, and that He would multiply his descendants, and all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed (26:2-4). And the LORD repeated this covenant promises with him because *Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws* (26:5). The LORD was telling Isaac to be like his father, Abraham, who had implicitly and wholeheartedly obeyed Him. Isaac could not have a better and greater assurance from the LORD.

Isaac Obeys & Stays in Gerar

Isaac obediently remained in Gerar. But a sad note followed. In spite of the assurances of God's blessings and presence, Isaac made the same mistake as his father Abraham. When the men of Gerar asked about Rebekah, he lied that she was his sister because like Abraham, he feared that if he had said that she was his wife, they would kill him (26:7). This coupled with the fear for his life resorted not only to lying about Rebekah but also to think that the men of Gerar were unscrupulous people. This was exactly what his father Abraham did despite God's assurances of His blessings and presence. Isaac showed a lack of faith and trust in the LORD. Isaac could not keep the lie long enough. Abimelech the king of the Philistines looked out of a window. What he saw shocked him. Isaac was *sporting* (conjugal caressing) with Rebekah. Such behaviour is more befitting of a man with his wife. Straightway, Abimelech confronted Isaac to confirm that Rebekah was his wife, contrary to what he had told them. The king further said that one of his people could have committed adulterous relationship with her and Isaac would have brought this guilt upon them (26:9). Isaac confessed and gave his reason for lying. Abimelech issued a charge to all his people that any man who *touches* Isaac or his wife would face the death penalty (26:11).

What an embarrassment for Isaac – the heathen behaved more honourably than he! God had put His law in the hearts of the people so that they could know right from wrong.

The LORD Blesses Isaac

Isaac's confession and Abimelech's charge to his people gave protection to Isaac and his family. This was indeed the LORD'S doing. Isaac was now free to work as a farmer in the land. His enterprise was successful beyond expectation. He became very wealthy as expressed in the text (26:13): *And the man waxed great (Hebrew, gadal), and went forward, and grew (Hebrew, gadal) until he became very great (Hebrew gadal). Great* is mentioned three times in this verse! His stock of flocks and herds, and even servants increased. It was because the LORD blessed him! Once again, the LORD showed His mercy and faithfulness in keeping His promises.

God blessed Isaac. Often blessings come with a backlash. Other people become jealous and envious. The Philistines were jealous of his wealth and prosperity. The opposition started first with the closure of all the wells of water, which had been dug during Abraham's time by his servants. The Philistines closed those wells by filling them with earth (26:15). The reason for such an action was quite obvious. A lack of water would mean Isaac could not continue to prosper and increase in

his agricultural activities. Ultimately, Abimelech told Isaac to go away admitting that the latter had become more powerful than the Philistines. He was afraid that Isaac might over power them and take their land.

The LORD Assures Isaac of His Presence

Being a peace-loving man, Isaac quietly departed from that place and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, which was eastward nearer to Canaan. Here in the valley, Isaac reopened the wells of water, which Abraham had dug in his days for these wells had been closed by the Philistines after the death of Abraham. Isaac named the wells the same names, which were given by his father. Then Isaac's servants found a well of spring-water. Opposition started again. The Philistine's herdsmen came and claimed that the well of spring- water belonged to them. Isaac gave them the well and called it *Esek* (contention) because of the strife between the Philistines and he. However, he dug another well, and this one too the Philistines claimed it. Isaac called it *Sitnah* (hatred). After this incident, Isaac, wearied of such strife, moved on from there. In this new place he dug another well and this time the Philistines did not contend for it. The place was probably quite a distance away. Isaac named his new well of water, *Rehoboth* (room). Isaac acknowledged and praised the LORD'S providence. God had made *room* for

them, and that they would be fruitful in the land (26:22). His faith was increasing. He must have stayed at *Rehoboth* for some time before he departed for Beersheba, the city where his father Abraham had dwelt. He should have moved there in the first place and freed himself of all the troubles.

Isaac's faith needed further strengthening. In keeping to His promises, God appeared to him a second time and said that just as He was the God of Abraham, He was also his God – Abraham's God is Isaac's God.

The LORD told him not to be afraid, and reassured His presence with him. He would bless him and multiply his seed for Abraham's sake (26:24). There Isaac built an altar and called on the name of the LORD (26:25). There he pitched his tent where his servants dug a well. Apparently, he was staying put in Beersheba. He had seen the graciousness and faithfulness of God. In the process of strengthening his faith, God used those incidents to bring him back to where he should be, in Beersheba where Abraham had settled, in the Promised Land.

Abimelech Makes a Covenant with Isaac

Abimelech journeyed all the way from Gerar to Beersheba. He was accompanied by Ahuzzath, his friend, and Phicol, his Commander –in-Chief of his army (26:26). Isaac was

surprised that Abimelech came to him for he said (26:27): *Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?* Abimelech answered that *the LORD was with thee* (26:28a). This is an interesting testimony of the faithfulness of God by a pagan. The LORD promised Isaac in the beginning that *I will be with thee* (26:3). That phrase is in the future tense. Then it was *I am with thee* (26:24). That is in the present tense. And now, in the testimony of Abimelech, *the LORD was (or had been) with thee* (26:28). Based on the text, this was absolutely true – Isaac's agricultural activities were fruitful; his repeated discovery of wells in a land where water was a very essential commodity; and his increasing power and influence.

Abimelech continued to propose that they made a covenant with Isaac. The term of the covenant was that they should not harm one another. Abimelech reasoned that they had not hurt Isaac physically, but in fact, they had done only good to Isaac, and had even sent him away in peace. Abimelech further remarked that he was *the blessed of the LORD* (26:29). Isaac treated them to a feast. They did eat and drink. Then early in the morning they endorsed the covenant with an oath. And Isaac sent them away in peace. The drinking and eating in a feast marked the agreement

and acceptance of the proposition, which was eventually sealed with an oath by both parties. Not long later, Isaac's servants reported to him that they had dug and found water. Isaac called this well, Shebah (an oath). Beersheba means "the well of an oath".

The chapter ends with a sad note. Esau, who was forty years old, took two Hittite women – Judith, the daughter of Beerli, and Bashemath, the daughter of Eglon – to be his wives. No reason is given why he took them. His action grieved his father and mother.

PRACTICAL VALUE

One of the most important lessons, which we learn in this chapter, is to be where God wants us to be. God told Isaac not to go down to Egypt, where it was a place of plenty and comfort. Isaac obeyed in spite of the famine in the land of Canaan. Are we in a place where God wants us to be or does not want us to be? In those days, God appeared to His servants. Today, He speaks to us through His Spirit, who indwells, and His Word (the Bible). If we are faithful in feeding on His Word and growing spiritually, we will be able to discern His will. And God will use many other ways to lead and guide us just as He had led and blessed Isaac. He led him from Gerar back to Beersheba by blessing him and by the

troubles and problems that he had to confront. Things will happen in our life and they might be God's road signs for us. Events happen in our lives not by chance. They can be God's way to tell us that we ought to move on and be where He wants us to be. Be discerning and knowing the will of God. In such instances, we must step out by faith having done what we ought to have done.

We learn in this chapter that obedience to the LORD brings His blessings upon us. The God of Abraham and Isaac is the same God whom we believe and worship. Just as He kept His promises with Isaac that He *will be* with him, and *is with* him, and He *had been with* him, He will treat us the same, as long as we obey His commandments. The LORD is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). One other lesson is that confession of sin will result in the blessings of the LORD. When Isaac was convicted of lying to Abimelech, he was abundantly blessed by the LORD. From then on he lived in obedience to Him.

Isaac was a peace-loving man. We see this in his dealings with Abimelech and his men. *When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* (Proverbs 16:7). This is illustrated in the life of Isaac. Isaac had learned to

trust God after being rebuked by Abimelech. Each time he was attacked, he gave way, and God blessed him. His enemy, Abimelech could not take it anymore. Isaac became stronger and more powerful despite his attempts to weaken him. Abimelech came to make a peace treaty with Isaac. Once again, Isaac graciously received him, in spite of the fact that Isaac knew all along that Abimelech and his men hated him and drove him away. He obliged by agreeing to the peace treaty. He then treated them to a feast—a customary ratification of the treaty. And God attended to the occasion by the servant's news that water was found in the well that they were digging!

Each time when Isaac was confronted with these oppositions, he moved on because he trusted the LORD, who promised to be with him. The LORD will do the same for us. Did not our Lord Jesus Christ teach us the same way (Matthew 5:11-12): *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

The presence of the LORD ensures safety, prosperity and success even when there are problems and troubles. We have seen it in the life of

Isaac here in this chapter. His life is written here for our learning so that we might have faith in the LORD, and that faith would increase from strength to strength. Make sure that the LORD'S presence is with us. The thing that will separate us from the fellowship of the LORD and be deprived of His presence is our sin of disobedience. God has laid in His word the two ways: one leads to joy, the other to sorrow. Choose which path we should take. Be wise and choose the straight and narrow way that leads to life and abundant life. It happened to Isaac. And there is no good reason why it cannot happen to you and me.

God can sometimes use an unbeliever to rebuke us for our sin. Abimelech rebuked Isaac for lying to him about Rebekah, and it could have caused them to commit adultery. We must not be like Isaac to have unkind thoughts about others, especially, when there is no reason for thinking so. In such situation, let us humbly accept the correction and confess our wrongdoing. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that *whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophet* (Matthew 7:12). AMEN