

Genesis 26

While the story of Abraham took up chapters 12-25 and the story of Jacob will take up arguably, chapters 27 through the rest of the book, this is the one chapter dedicated to Isaac. He is the only monogamous patriarch and the only one who practices farming. We see some positive attributes in his character as well as one negative attribute, which reflects the nature of his dad.

TRANSLATION - 26:1-4:

1 Then there was a famine in the land, worse than the former famine which was in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines toward Gerar. **2** Then Jehovah appeared to him and said, "Do not go down toward Egypt. Dwell in the land which I will say to you. **3** Stay temporarily in this land and I will be with you and I will bless you because to you and to your seed I am giving all these lands and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. **4** And I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and I will give to your seed all these lands and they will be blessed in your seed all the peoples of the land. **5** Since Abraham listened to my voice and he kept my precepts, my commandments, and my laws."

WORDS:

"Famine" (verse 1; 101 times) was first used in 12:10 and will be found extensively in the Joseph story (41:27, 30-31, 36, 50, 54, 56-57). Some have observed that there appears to have been many famines in Israel. While the climate was conducive to famines, with limited rainfall (below 12" per year), it is also true that God tested His people by causing famines and God punished His people the same way. "Stay temporarily" (verse 3; 82 times) was used in 12:10; 19:9; 20:1; 21:3-4. It suggests an alien in a land or staying temporarily.

"Precepts" (verse 5; 78 times) is found here for the first time. It is related to the verb (420 times) "to guard or to keep." Its fundamental idea is "to exercise great care over." The noun refers to responsibilities that must be kept. "Commandments" (184 times) is related to the verb "to command" (496 times). This is the first time the noun is used in God's Word. "Laws" (223 times) means "law, teaching, training, or instruction." It is therefore much broader than just laws. It includes the instruction that accompanies laws. For example, the "Law of Moses" is identified as Genesis-Deuteronomy. Yet much of that text is historical narrative; but it too is "law." Its related verb means "to instruct, teach" (47 times). This is the first use of the noun.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Abimelech was first introduced to the reader in 20:2. This "Abimelech" is likely different than the first since several decades have passed, perhaps as many as 75 years. Philistines were first seen in 10:14; 21:32, 34. Gerar was the location of Abimelech in 20:1-2.

COMMENTS:

Like his father (12:10), Isaac has to move his herds because of a famine. Like his father (20:1), Isaac meets Abimelech, the king of the Philistines at Gerar. This is likely a different Abimelech than Abraham met in chapter 20 since we're talking about several decades. If so, "Abimelech" might be a royal name like "Pharaoh."

But Jehovah God appears to Isaac. In verses 2-4, there are eight verbs with Jehovah God as the subject. He is taking action! Jehovah first tells Isaac not to go to Egypt. Second, Jehovah tells Isaac to remain in the land. Third, God promises to be with Isaac. Fourth, God repeats promises to Isaac which He had given to Abraham (cf. 22:17-18): 1) God will bless Isaac (cf. 25:11), 2) God will give him the land, and 3) God will establish the oath with him which He had given to Abraham. This oath likely refers to the covenant God made with his father in chapter 17. Fifth, God promises to make Isaac's descendants numerous, as the stars

of heaven. Sixth, the nations of the earth will be blessed by Isaac's descendants (cf. 12:1-3; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18-21; 17:2-8; 22:17-18).

These promises were given to Isaac, notice the text, "*because Abraham obeyed God.*" It doesn't serve a purpose in arguing whether a certain covenant was "conditional" or "unconditional." God expected Abraham to obey and Abraham obeyed. *Because Abraham obeyed, God repeated His promise to Abraham's son, Isaac.* The designations "precepts, commandments, and laws," are not easily distinguished as if Abraham, or Israel under Moses, had a well-developed theory of jurisprudence. The terms are synonyms which look at laws from different perspectives.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Isaac should and will listen to God, as his father had done. Verse 5 shows us that living by faith involves living an obedient life.

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel will be compelled to obey God, His precepts, commandments, and laws throughout the Law of Moses (Lev. 26:14-15, 46; Deut. 11:1; 4:40; 8:11; 26:16-17). Abraham is an example of faithful obedience for the nation. Israel will be forbidden to return to Egypt (Deut. 17:16).

Later Hebrew writers - No biblical writer will ever downplay the importance of obeying God. "Commandments" of God will never be used in a negative sense in biblical writings (1 Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58).

NT writers - Jesus will also call on His disciples to obey the commandments of God, as Jesus does (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24).

TRANSLATION - 26:6-11:

6 So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. **7** Then the men of the place asked of his wife and he said, "My sister she [is]," because he was afraid to say, "My wife," lest the men of the place kill him on account of Rebekah since beautiful of appearance she [was].

8 Thus it was that they delayed there days and Abimelech looked, the king of the Philistines, through the window and he saw and behold, Isaac was laughing with Rebekah, his wife. **9** So Abimelech called to Isaac and said, "Surely, behold, your wife she [is]. So how could you say, 'My sister she [is]'? So Isaac said to him, "Because I said, thus I will die on her account."

10 So Abimelech said, "What [is] this you have done to us? Easily he [could have] laid down, one of the nation, with your wife and he would bring on us guilt." **11** So Abimelech commanded all the nation saying, "The one touching this man even his wife, to die he will die."

WORDS:

"Window" (verse 8; 32 times) was first seen on the ark (8:6). "Easily" (verse 10; 101 times) means "a few or a little." "Guilt" (46 times) gives its name to a sacrifice (35 times) and the abstract noun (19 times). This is its first occurrence.

GRAMMAR:

"To die he will die" (verse 11) is the infinite absolute followed by the imperfect, the grammatical construction for emphasis.

COMMENTS:

Isaac dwelt in Gerar with the Philistines. Rebekah was said to be very beautiful in 24:16. So, the Philistines asked if she was marriageable. Isaac responded, as his father had done twice before he was born (12:12; 20:5), that Rebekah was his sister. As with his dad, he was afraid that the men would kill him so they could marry Rebekah. Apparently no one made an active effort to take Rebekah.

It was many days later when Abimelech happened to look out his window and saw that Isaac was "laughing" with Rebekah. Again, the word "laughing" is a wordplay on Isaac's name

(21:6, 9; 17:17; 18:12). Yet, since Abimelech concludes that they must be married, the word carries a more intimate connotation in this text (cf. 39:14, 17; Exo. 32:6). Thus, different translations use the word “fondling, caressing,” or something like that. Abimelech knew they weren’t brother and sister!

Having learned the truth, Abimelech scolded Isaac for concealing the truth. A man of Gerar could have slept with a married woman and brought guilt on the nation of the Philistines. Clearly the non-Israelites had enough morality about them to know that it was sin to take a married man’s wife. Abimelech threatens with death any of his own people who would harm either Isaac or Rebekah.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - As with Abraham, it is easy for us to criticize Isaac for putting Rebekah in a dangerous position. It seems to illustrate a lack of faith on his part. Yet knowledge of Jehovah God and His ways was not very widespread and Isaac did not have a wide range of experiences to inform his decisions. It is likely that God worked, in some way as He had before, to preserve Rebekah’s purity.

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel could have learned from Isaac’s example that it was pointless to doubt God’s ability to provide. Israel will be required to offer “guilt” offerings: Lev. 5 & 6.

Later Hebrew writers - Solomon writes that if the Israelites’ lives please the Lord, He’ll make their enemies be at peace with them (Prov. 16:7).

NT writers - We often follow in the footsteps of our parents, for good or bad, sometimes without even knowing it. Isaac teaches us that living out of fear, rather than trust in God can have catastrophic consequences.

TRANSLATION - 26:12-23:

12 So Isaac sowed in that land and he harvested in that year one hundredfold and Jehovah blessed him. **13** And the man increased and he began to grow and to increase until that he increased exceedingly. **14** And there was to him property of flocks and property of cattle and many servants and the Philistines envied him. **15** So all the wells which they dug, the servants of his father, in the days of Abraham, his father, they stopped them up, the Philistines and filled them with dirt. **16** So Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go from us because you have become exceedingly more powerful than us.”

17 So Isaac went from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar and dwelt there. **18** So Isaac dwelt and dug the wells of water which they dug in the days of Abraham, his father, and the Philistines stopped them up after Abraham died and he called to them their name as the names which he called to them his father. **19** So the servants of Isaac dug in the river and they found there a well of active water. **20** So they disputed, the shepherds of Gerar with the shepherds of Isaac, saying, “Ours [are] the waters.” So he called the name of the well Esek because they oppressed him.

21 Then they dug another well and they strove again over it and he called its name Sitnah. **22** Then Isaac left from there and he dug another well and they did not strive over it and he called its name Rehobot and he said that, “Now Jehovah has enlarged us and become fruitful in the land.”

23 Then he went up from there to Beer Sheba.

WORDS:

“Sowed” (verse 12) is the verbal form of the noun translated “seed” earlier in the context. The word “harvested” is the word “to find.” “Envied” (verse 14; 34 times) can also mean “jealous.” “Stopped up” (verse 15; 13 times) means to “close, hide, disguise, or plug up.” “To become powerful” (verse 16; 17 times) means to “be vast, powerful, mighty, numerous.” This is its first use. “Active” (verse 19), referring to water, comes from the same word as “alive

or living.” “To dispute” (verse 20; 72 times) means to “strive, quarrel, dispute.” It can be used in the context of a lawsuit. “Shepherds” is the participle of the verb “to shepherd” (167 times). “Oppressed” (37 times) means to “exploit or wrong” someone.

“Left” (verse 22; 9 times) means to “leave on, move on.” It was seen first in 12:8. “Has enlarged” (26 times) means “to make open wide, enlarge, extend.” “Become fruitful” is related to the word “fruit.” The word has been seen in 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:6, 20.

GRAMMAR:

In verse 13, the word “to increase” is found three times. The emphasis here is on the strong and rapid rate at which Isaac became wealthy.

COMMENTS:

As an example of God’s blessing Isaac, Moses informs us that Isaac farmed (probably grain or barley) and reaped one hundred times more than he had sown! That is a tremendous increase, especially in the context of a famine (verse 1)! Yet this increase motivated the Philistines to become envious of Isaac. Verse 13 emphasizes in a number of ways how greatly God had blessed Isaac and made his wealth multiply.

Because of their envy, the Philistines began to make life hard on Isaac by closing up the wells that Abraham had dug (21:22-34). In a land that depended on groundwater to provide for their flocks and families, this was tantamount to an act of war. It seems, out of fear, Abimelech asked Isaac to take his flocks and cattle and move somewhere else.

So Isaac listened and moved. He needed water, so he dug more wells, but the Philistines closed up those wells also. They found an active well, but then the herdsmen from Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, so Isaac called the name “Esek,” for “quarrel.” Isaac’s men dug another well and they all quarreled over that one also, which Isaac called “Sitnah,” for “enmity.”

Isaac moved again, apparently far enough away, because the Philistines left him alone. So, he named that well “Rehobot” for “broad” or “room.” Isaac saw this as an indication that God was making room for the Philistines as well as Isaac’s family in the land.

Then Isaac went to Beer Sheba (see 21:14; 21:31-33).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Isaac is a great example of perseverance. He is also an example of meekness. He could have waged war on Abimelech (cf. 26:16). But he patiently moved slowly away, trusting God to provide the water he needed. Jealousy will be seen again in Genesis 30:1, 37:11.

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel should have learned, as they were wandering in the wilderness, that God would provide the water they needed. There was no reason to grumble, complain, or quarrel. God would bless His children. The Law will warn Israel against envy (Exo. 20:17). Israel will be considered “powerful” also in Exo. 1:7, 20. God recognizes that men might be jealous over their wives (Num. 5:14, 30). God will warn Israel not to make God jealous by giving their hearts to idols (Deut. 32:16, 21).

Later Hebrew writers - Israel will provoke God to jealous (1 Kings 14:22; Psa. 78:58). The psalmist will warn Israel not to be envious of evildoers (Psa. 37:1; 73:3; Prov. 3:31; 23:17; 24:1, 19).

NT writers - Christians should also learn a valuable lesson about the relationship between persevering in doing what is good with self-control to rely on God to provide. God warns Christians against envy (Gal. 5:19-21). Other passages which warn against jealousy and envy in Christians are: Rom. 1:29; 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; James 3:14, 16.

TRANSLATION - 26:24-31:

24 Then Jehovah appeared to him in that night and said, “I [am] the God of Abraham, your father. Do not fear because with you I [am] and I will bless you and I will multiply your seed for the sake of Abraham My servant.”

25 So he built there an altar and called on the name of Jehovah and he spread out there his tent and they dug there the servants of Isaac a well. **26** Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar and Ahuzoth, his friend, and Philcol, his Prince of Armies. **27** Then Isaac said to them, “Why have you all come to me since you all hated me and sent me from you?”

28 So they said, “To see we have seen that Jehovah is with you and we say, “Let a curse be, please, between us, between us and you and let us cut a covenant with you. **29** If you do with us evil just as we have not touched you and just as we do with you, only good, then we send you away in peace, yourself now, blessed [by] Jehovah.”

30 Then he made for them a banquet and they ate and they drank. **31** Then they arose early in the morning and they swore, each man to his brother, and Isaac sent them away and they went from him in peace.

WORDS:

“Fear” (verse 24; 317 times) can also mean to hold someone in “reverence or honor.” It was seen in 3:10; 15:1; 18:15; 19:30; 20:8; 21:17. “Friend” (verse 26; 9 times) occurs only a few times in the OT. This is its only occurrence in the Pentateuch. “Prince of Armies” translates two words, “prince” and “armies” or “hosts” (see 2:1). “Hate” (verse 27; 148 times) can refer to an “enemy” as well as someone who hates. “Curse” (verse 28; 34 times) can carry a more neutral connotation as an “oath.” “To cut” is frequently used with the word “covenant,” probably reflecting the offering of animals as a part of the ceremony (see comments at 15:18). “Peace” (verse 29; 237 times) carries the idea of wholeness, deliverance, or welfare. It was used first at 15:15. “Banquet” (verse 30; 46 times) was seen at 19:3; 21:8.

GRAMMAR:

“To see we have seen” (verse 27) is the emphatic construction, an infinitive absolute with a perfect.

COMMENTS:

God appeared to Isaac a second time that night (26:24; see verse 2) and reminded Isaac that He was the God of Isaac’s father, Abraham. God never identified Himself as “the God of Terah.” He began a new, unique relationship in the post-flood world with Abraham and his family. This is the only place in Genesis where Abraham is called the servant of God. God challenges Isaac not to fear because God would be with Isaac (cf. 26:3). God promises a second time that He would bless Isaac and multiply his family because of His promise to Isaac’s father, Abraham. In response to this second appearance, Isaac built an altar, as his father did many times, and Isaac “called on the name of the Lord.” Isaac settled down in Beer Sheba and dug a well for his flocks and herds and family.

Yet Isaac’s dealings with Abimelech are not finished. Abimelech had expressed fear of Isaac back in verse 16. Here, in verse 26, Abimelech comes to Isaac from Gerar and brings with him two officials: Ahuzoth, an advisor (literally, “friend”) and Phicol, the commander of Abimelech’s army. “Phicol” was also seen in chapter 21 and, again, he is likely different from that individual.

Isaac challenges their presence and their motivation, accusing them of hating Isaac and driving his family away from Gerar. The men speak in terms of Jehovah God. We do not know if this means they were monotheists or if they were calling on Isaac’s God. They could see that Isaac’s God had blessed him and they did not want there to be enmity and rancor between them. We can hardly believe that Abimelech would say that his people had done nothing wrong against Isaac, after his men had closed up Isaac’s wells. However, he apparently wished to avoid retaliation. He wants an oath, a covenant, between the two groups of people.

Isaac complied. They ate a feast together. They arose in the morning and made their oath between them and they left one another in peace.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - God blessed Isaac a second time by appearing to him, and renewed Isaac's faith that God would provide for him. Perhaps this motivated Isaac to make the covenant with Abimelech rather than engaging in armed conflict with him.

Contemporaries of Moses - The story illustrates throughout that God would provide for His people, in the face of Philistine aggression, if His people would trust God and walk with Him. The Philistines illustrate that other nations will recognize Israel's blessings (in fulfillment of Gen. 12:3) if Israel will stay faithful to God.

NT writers - God continues to tell Christians not to be afraid but to walk with Him in faith (2 Tim. 1:7).

TRANSLATION - 26:32-35:

32 Then it was in that day that the servants of Isaac came and announced to him, for the sake of the well which they dug and they said to him, "We have found water." **33** So he called it Shibah because there the city of Beer Sheba [is] until this day.

34 So it was Esau [was] the son of forty years and he took a wife, Jehudith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, daughter of Elion, the Hittite. **35** And they were bitter spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah.

WORDS:

"Bitter" (verse 35) means "bitterness" or "sorrow." "Spirit" has been seen a few times before, notably as it referred to the Spirit of God at 1:2. In Proverbs 14:10, it is the soul that is bitter; here, the spirit.

COMMENTS:

This is now the fourth reference to Isaac's men digging wells for their needs. The men were excited about finding water at this well. Consequently, Isaac called the well "Shibah," which means "oath" and is similar to "seven" (cf. 21:27-34). This was the location of the community called Beer Sheba (found 34 times in the OT).

Moses concludes this discussion by bringing the life of Esau up-to-date. At the age of 40 years, when Isaac married Rebekah (25:20), Esau also married a wife. However, Esau did not find a wife from their own family, as Isaac had done. Nor was he content with monogamy. He married two Hittite women: Jehudith and Basemath. Both of these women, unfortunately, were "bitter spirit" to Esau's parents. We are not told that the issue was over religious convictions, so we do not know why Isaac and Rebekah were not happy with Esau's choices. But perhaps his choice was the reason God chose Jacob to bear the promised seed. In the next chapter Isaac and Esau will try to circumvent that promise.