



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Genesis 26:1-33 – The Isaac Famine and Envy of Philistines

February 17, 2019

Last week's Lesson from the latter part of Chapter 25 continued our study of Isaac and his lineage. In particular, we were introduced to the story of Jacob and Esau, the vivid difference in personalities and family dynamics along with the selling of Esau's birthright.

With that backdrop as we start with Chapter 26, it generally takes the form of a mosaic of Isaac stories as opposed to a detailed narrative. It is speculated that the mild, patient and gentle mannered Isaac did not capture the imagination of the Israeli story tellers as much as Jacob or Abraham, therefore the stories are generally less developed and vivid.

1) **The Isaac Passages 26:1-5**

¹ Now there was a famine in the land—besides the previous famine in Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelek king of the Philistines in Gerar. ² The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions."

How history seems to repeat itself. It seems that Isaac was heading to Egypt during a bad famine just as his father Abraham had done all those years before for grain. On Isaac's trip, God himself intervened and appeared to Isaac. This was Isaac's real initial test of faith. To trust and believe in God enough to stay in the land with all its famine and hardships.

Isaac met the spiritual test without a murmur and as a consequence became more prosperous than Abraham ever was (Vs 12-16). The promise offered directly from God was the same one offered to Abraham that we studied back in Chapter 12:1-3. Ironically it was offered to Abraham to leave his homeland while Isaac was told to stay.

I want us to consider several key points in these verses:

- Why do you imagine that Isaac was going down to Egypt for the famine? While it most certainly could have been something as simple as that was where the grain was; consider the idea of parental precedent. They all knew the old stories of Abraham's day and decisions made. Your parental decisions are setting lifelong precedents for your family.
- Verse 5 directly states that "because Abraham obeyed" Isaac had the opportunity to be great among men. I mention "opportunity" for a couple of key reasons:
 - Our own actions, decisions and directions in obeying God's plan affect more than just yourself. It has lasting impact on your spouse, children and in this case millions beyond
 - Isaac had to choose himself to continue to obey, it was not the sole result of his fathers actions or plans
- What is our legacy of decisions with respect to God? Are we making the right decision's now to be a vessel for God's use with a positive large lasting impact?

2) **Abimelech and Rebekah 26:6-11**

⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." ⁸ When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. ⁹ So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." ¹⁰ Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." ¹¹ So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who harms this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Ironically these passages are parallel to the stories of Chapter 12:10-20 and 20:1-18 which also tell of Abraham jeopardizing his wife Sarah to save his own skin pretending they were brother and sister! It is quite possible that Isaac was intentionally trying to repeat his fathers successful maneuver in Egypt from chapter 12. No doubt they had heard that story many times growing up.

The problems however start from the story comparing Chapter 20's deception from Abraham. In Chapter 20 the king was also named Abimelech even though it was at least 75 years later. Later we will also see that the military commander was named Phicol, the same name as in Chapter 20. While these current leaders could have retained the same names as was common in that day from former respected military and royal names, it is generally thought to be the same individuals as in Chapter 20's Abraham story.

So you now have the same King Abimelech trying to be tricked by the son of the father who tried this same story some 75 years earlier! This is most likely why he was spying on them as he suspected something fishy from the start. This was not his first rodeo with this family and hearing this story!!

You will remember that God himself appeared in a dream to King Abimelech concerning not sleeping with Sarah since she was a married woman after he had taken her into his possession. So now you have a man who had been warned by God himself, who was most certainly on edge hearing that story again!

3) **Envy of the Philistines 26:12-22**

¹² Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. ¹³ The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. ¹⁶ Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us." ¹⁷ So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar, where he settled. ¹⁸ Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them. ¹⁹ Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. ²⁰ But the herders of Gerar quarreled with those of Isaac and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. ²² He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

This is the first mention of farming among the patriarchs. Isaac was obviously very successful during the famine after he obeyed God and stayed in the land. This was a direct blessing and promise fulfilled from God himself. This marked a new era in the Hebrew settlement of Canaan. The reaping of 100 fold was not uncommon during "good years", but during a famine was unheard of.

The large amount of wealth that God granted to Isaac as a steward of His riches, was met with envy among the Philistines. Interesting to note that this also could have brought respect, which also happens quite often in these situations. Let's also remember that it was only back in Chapter 20 and 21, where the same Abimelech desired that Abraham stay in his land so that his nearness and blessings would somehow benefit his greater kingdom.

It is generally thought that the Philistines had learned since chapter 20 that God's blessings upon the Hebrews would be exclusively retained by them. There was no residual rub off or proximity affect!

Matter of fact, due to the growth in the Hebrew flocks and crops, it was essentially crowding out the Philistines from their own land. At this point Abimelech suggested that they separate and leave the land all together. To "help them" in their decision to leave, Abimelech had all of their water wells plugged. You will remember that these were some of the same wells that had conflicts earlier with Abraham and Abimelech resulting in their covenant to stay in the land. Isaac's activity as a well digger took place in three phases: 1) He dug again the wells that Abraham had originally opened, 2) He abandoned the new wells about the time the Philistines disputed with him on leaving the land and 3) New wells that no one contested that were far enough away from the Philistines to complain.

Isaac's naming of the wells with the same names as his father Abraham, showed great respect for the past. His avoidance of contested wells and also not telling Abimelech that he was not leaving, showed a very peaceful nature and positive virtue. He obviously did not want conflict with his neighbors.

He also showed great contentment in where they settled since we obviously did not originally desire or seek out this land at the start of this process of leaving.

4) **Covenant with Abimelech at Beersheba 26:23-33**

²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." ²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. ²⁶ Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. ²⁷ Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" ²⁸ They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the Lord." ³⁰ Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully. ³² That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" ³³ He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

Now for the first time, Isaac himself builds an altar where Abraham had planted the tamarisk tree all those many years earlier. How he personally must have felt, comparing his altar experience to now being the leader of the Hebrews in their own land and worshipping their God. God had blessed them immensely through them obeying and honoring Him.

This episode with Abimelech and Phicol is almost identical to Chapter 21 with Abraham. While we talked earlier in Chapter 26 about it being the same individuals as the stories with Abraham, now with so many additional years having passed, it is generally felt that these men are more likely to be their successors with the same names. There is a huge difference though from the Chapter 21 experience. Abraham previously brought all of the gifts to King Abimelech as the superior figure. Abraham also ate from the table of

Abimelech. Here King Abimelech is now eating at the table of Isaac and bringing the gifts to him for a covenant of peace. The meek man Isaac, had grown and inherited more than his father Abraham ever had. While some view Isaac as more of a “link” between Abraham and Jacob, the patriarch father and the legendary son; He was a significant person himself and a giant in his own right. He established his own place as a man of stature. Isaac proved to be a skillful negotiator who established peaceful relations with the neighboring people, thus securing an environment for God’s people to live and be extremely prosperous.

5) Group Discussion:

1. Read Verses 4 and 5 in the group. Discuss how much of God’s plan for Isaac was driven by or based on what Abraham decided?
 - a) Do you think that God’s plan for your life is based only on you and your decisions?
 - b) How can God use our family or others to affect the path of our own lives?
 - c) Think of what we have previously studied about God’s Sovereignty, control and plan for our lives; Is it driven in anyway by others decisions?
2. As parents, how often do we consider our choices directly affecting our children’s path, successes or difficulties? Discuss our responsibilities
3. Read verses 12-14 and cover the following questions:
 - a) Discuss the current “Prosperity Gospel” philosophy among some churches and how it relates or does not relate to Isaac’s prosperity
 - b) Is God’s word promising us that if we obey we will receive material wealth? How do you prevent God’s people from using this verse to that point?
 - c) What can we learn from the reaction of the Philistines to Isaacs wealth?
4. What are a couple of penultimate storylines or lessons we as individuals should learn from Isaac’s decisions and corresponding results in Chapter 26?