

Genesis Chapter 26

Genesis 26:1 "And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar."

"A famine in the land": Once again the land of promise forced the beneficiaries of the covenant to move so as to escape the effects of a famine.

There had been a famine in Abraham's day (12:10). He had not been forbidden to go down to Egypt as Isaac was now being directed by God (in verse 2). God forced Isaac to trust in His ability to provide, and not to do the natural thing that everybody else would be doing (42:5).

Besides, this was God's promised land for Abraham and his descendants (verses 3-4).

"Abimelech": Most probably a Philistine dynastic title, with this being a different king from the one who had met Abraham (chapter 20; see note on 20:2).

"Philistines": This tribe of people who originally sailed the Mediterranean Sea became fierce enemies of Israel when they settled along the southwest coast of Palestine. Friendly to Isaac, they were forerunners of hostile descendant enemies.

Verses 2-11: Obedience and deceit were in "juxtaposition" (the fact of two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect). Obeying God to dwell in the land (verses 2-3, 6), yet lying about his wife to the people of the land (verses 7-11), reflected familiar shades of Abraham's strategy for survival (see 12:10-14; 20:1-4).

Genesis 26:2 "And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:"

"And the Lord appeared unto him": In a vision or dream, when he was at Gerar.

"Go not down into Egypt": As his father had done in the like case, and where Isaac thought to have gone, and the rather, as that was a fruitful country.

The Targum of Jonathan, "And it was in the heart of Isaac to go down into Egypt". And the Lord appeared unto him and charged him not to go there; partly to try his faith in him, and dependence on his providence for support in this time of famine, and partly lest he should think of continuing there, and be unmindful of the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham's seed.

"Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of": Even the land of Canaan, which he was now about to give him on account of the promise of it to Abraham and his seed, and to renew it to him and to his seed.

Verses 3-5: God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant with Isaac, stressing the same 3 elements as before: land, seed, and blessing. He appended specific honorable mention of Abraham's obedient response to all of God's words (see notes on 12:1-3; 15:13:21; 17:2, 7-9).

Although Abraham was commended for his deeds, the Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant grounded in God's sovereign will (Lev. 26:44-45).

Genesis 26:3 "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father;"

"Sojourn in this land": The land of Canaan, where he now was. Either in Gerar, which though in the land of the Philistines was a part of Canaan, the place of his present residence; or in any other part of it he should be directed to. However, by this it appears it was the pleasure of God that he should not go out of that land, and which Abraham his father was careful of, that he should not while he lived (see Genesis 24:6).

"And I will be with thee, and I will bless thee": With his presence and with protection from all enemies; with a supply of all the necessities of life; and with all spiritual blessings, and with eternal life and happiness.

"For unto thee, and to thy seed, will I give these countries": Inhabited at that time by the Philistines, Canaanites, and the several tribes of them.

"And I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father": Concerning the promise of the Messiah from him and his seed, the gift of the land of Canaan to them, and the multiplication of them (Genesis 22:16).

You see, God wants all of us to depend on Him in a crisis, and Isaac was no exception. These few verses above were just saying; do not compromise with the world (Egypt); to stay away from the famine. God was telling him, just depend on me; I will see you through it, if you will just trust me. God told Isaac, I have sworn to give you all of this land for your ancestors.

Genesis 26:4 "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;"

"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven": Meaning in the line of Jacob especially, if not only. From who sprung twelve patriarchs, the heads of so many tribes, which in process of time became very numerous, even as the stars of heaven.

"And I will give unto thy seed all these countries": Which is repeated from (Genesis 26:3), for the greater confirmation of it.

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed": Meaning in the Messiah that should spring from him (see Genesis 22:18; see Acts 3:25).

Here was God's promise, all over again, to Isaac that he had promised Abraham. This was an eternal promise to physical Israel and spiritual Israel.

Genesis 26:5 "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

"Because that Abraham obeyed my voice": In all things, and particularly in offering up his son at his command.

"And kept my charge": Whatever was given him in charge to observe; this, as Aben Ezra thinks, is the general, of which the particulars follow.

"My commandments, my statutes, and my laws": Whether moral, ceremonial, or civil and judicial; all and everyone which God commanded him, he was careful to observe. Here seems to be something wanting, for the words are not to be joined with the preceding.

As if Abraham's obedience was the cause of the above promises made to Isaac, or to himself. But this is mentioned rather as an example to Isaac, and to stir him up to do the like, as if it was said, because or seeing that Abraham thy father did so and so, do thou likewise.

You see, when Abraham first became acquainted with God, he was not already a believer. God charged him to get up and leave Ur of the Chaldees, and go where He sent him. Abraham did it. God commanded Abraham in the way he should live. Abraham obeyed. He followed God's statutes to the letter on circumcision, and kept God's laws. Abraham pleased God.

Verses 6-9: Unlike his ancestor to whom God sovereignly revealed the relationship between Abraham and Saran (20:3), this king providentially discovered Rebekah's relationship to Isaac by just happening to look out of a window and witnessing caresses indicative of marriage and intimacy.

Genesis 26:6 "And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:"

"And Isaac dwelt in Gerar": Continued there, and in this he was obedient to the command and will of God.

Genesis 26:7 "And the men of the place asked [him] of his wife; and he said, She [is] my sister: for he feared to say, [She is] my wife; lest, [said he], the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she [was] fair to look upon."

"And the men of the place asked him of his wife": The inhabitants of Gerar inquired of Isaac who she was, whether she was his wife or not, or in what relation she stood in to him; this was not a mere civil inquiry, but what arose from the prevalence of lust in them towards her.

And yet it was under some restraint, they being not so abandoned to their lusts as to exercise them upon any; not upon a man's wife, the sin of adultery being detestable to them, though that of fornication was made no account of by them.

"And he said, she is my sister": Herein imitating his father Abraham in his infirmity and unbelief, who in the same place had made such an answer to a like question concerning Sarah (Genesis 20:1). Which if Isaac knew of, as probably he did, one would wonder that he should fall into the same evil, and especially when he had not so much to say to support his assertion as Abraham had.

"For he feared to say, she is my wife": Which was the real truth; but the fear of men, which brings a snare, led him to this, and from which good men are not always free.

"Lest, said he": That is, within himself, in his own mind; and so the Targum of Jonathan, he thought in his heart.

"The men of the place should kill me for Rebekah": That they might marry her, one or other of them; for it seems, they had not so great a sense of the sin of murder, as of adultery.

"Because she was fair to look upon": Which he feared would be a temptation to them, and stir up their impure desires after her, in order to gratify themselves. Which he was afraid that they would kill him. Rebekah retaining her beauty still, though she had been married in all probability forty years or more (see Genesis 24:16).

"She is my sister" is the very same expression Abraham had used (12:13 and 20:12-13).

This was just a repeat of the same thing his father had said. The only difference was that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. Rebekah was actually a second cousin to Isaac. Fear is not of God.

Genesis 26:8 "And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac [was] sporting with Rebekah his wife."

"Abimelech" was evidently a philistine dynastic title. This was not the same Abimelech that Abraham had encountered some 97 years earlier.

Abimelech looked out at a window in his palace, near to which, in all likelihood, were the apartments that Isaac and Rebekah dwelt in. This he did accidentally, and not out of curiosity, or with any intention to observe or pry into the behavior and conduct of these two persons one towards the other.

He saw Isaac sporting with Rebekah. Laughing and joking with her, which by his motions and gestures, and the airs and freedoms he took, Abimelech could perceive were such as were not usual between brothers and sisters. Though was honest and lawful between man and wife. Such as embracing her in his arms, frequently kissing her, and the like.

Be sure your sins will find you out. This type thing cannot be covered, and sure enough, Abimelech caught them and found out that they were husband and wife.

Genesis 26:9 "And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she [is] thy wife: and how saidst thou, She [is] my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her."

"And Abimelech called Isaac": Sent a messenger to desire him to come to him.

"And said, behold, of a surety she is thy wife": And then perhaps told him of what he had observed that passed between them; which was a clear proof that they must be man and wife, or he would never have taken such liberties with her.

"And how saidst thou, she is my sister?": What reason had thou for it? What could induce thee to say so?

"And Isaac said unto him": Not alleging, as Abraham did, any relation that was between them before marriage.

"Because I said": That is, within himself, for he did not speak it out to others.

"Lest I die for her": For her sake, that another might have and enjoy her": It was fear of losing his life that led him to take such a step, and give out that she was his sister.

Genesis 26:10 "And Abimelech said, What [is] this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lain with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us."

"And Abimelech said, what is this thou hast done unto us": By entertaining suspicions and jealousies of us as bad men, and by exposing us to the temptation of committing iniquity. Why hast thou dealt thus with us, and what have we done, or is in our character, that thou should act after this manner?

"One of the people might lightly have lain with thy wife": It is much one or other had not before this time, not looking upon it criminal to have to do with a single woman, when they would not have meddled with another man's wife.

Jarchi interprets this of Abimelech himself; and so the Targum of Jonathan, who perhaps had been thinking of Abimelech taking her to his bed.

"And thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us": Been the occasion of their committing the sin of adultery, which was heinous in the eyes of Heathens, and of bringing on them the punishment due thereunto.

Genesis 26:11 "And Abimelech charged all [his] people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

"Charged all is people ... be put to death": A pagan king imposing the death penalty on anyone troubling Isaac or Rebekah suggests God was at work to preserve His chosen seed (verses 28-29; Psalms 105:14-15).

Abimelech recognized quickly that this was Isaac's wife. Abimelech was angry with Isaac, because had anyone slept with Rebekah, it would have caused serious trouble in the land. God would have punished them severely. Abimelech was afraid of God, and warned his people not to harm these two, who were in God's protection.

Verses 12-14: Isaac was content to stay in that place and farm some land. His efforts were blessed by God, but envied by the Philistines!

Genesis 26:12 "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him."

Isaac "sowed" in the land and received "a hundredfold" in spite of the famine and persecution because he obeyed God and was the promised seed.

This was a bountiful crop from God. This was an over-abundant blessing in this crop. Hundredfold is a tremendous return. Isaac had to plant the seed, before God could bless the harvest.

Genesis 26:13 "And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great:"

"And the man waxed great": In substance, as well as in honor and glory, among men.

"And went forward": In the world, and in the increase of worldly things.

"And grew until he became very great": As he must needs be, since Abraham his father left him all that he had, who was very rich in cattle, in gold and silver, and had been increasing ever since.

Especially since he came to Gerar, where he was gradually increasing, until he became to be exceeding great indeed, even the greatest man in all the country, yea, greater than King Abimelech himself, as it seems from (Genesis 26:16).

Genesis 26:14 "For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him."

"For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds": Many flocks of sheep, and herds of cattle, oxen, asses and camels, which the riches of men in those times and countries chiefly lay.

"And great store of servants": To look after his flocks and herds, and fields; or "much farming". Jarchi interprets it much tillage; as much land, many farms, fields, vineyards and the like. To cultivate which required many servants.

"And the Philistines envied him": For his prosperity and success, that his land should bring forth so plentifully, and that he should have such an increase of flocks, and herds, and servants, which made him so very significant great, and honorable.

God blessed Isaac abundantly, and not once, but God continued blessing him, until he was extremely wealthy. He had large flocks, and herds, and many servants. He was so wealthy that his Philistine neighbors were jealous of his wealth. This was not a healthy situation.

Genesis 26:15 "For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth."

"All the wells ... Stopped them": Water was so precious in that desert land that wells were essential.

Plugging someone's well was ruinous to them and constituted serious aggression, often leading to war. Isaac could have retaliated, but he did not; rather he dug new wells (verses 16-19).

Jealousy causes men to do strange things. The wells could have helped everyone. Filling a well was destruction without a purpose. It could do no one any good. Even today in Israel, they are re-digging some of the old wells.

Genesis 26:16 "And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we."

"And Abimelech said unto Isaac, go from us": Which was either said by way of advice, consulting Isaac's good, and the peace of his own kingdom; or else by way of command, enjoining him to depart, having a secret envy to him himself, or at least was jealous of his growing power and wealth.

"For thou art much mightier than we": In riches or goods, as the Targum of Jonathan adds; or in number; his family being greatly increased, his servants numerous, many being born of them in his house; Abraham had three hundred and eighteen trained servants in his house (Genesis 14:14).

How many Isaac had is not certain; they must be a large number for Abimelech to fear anything from them. Some choose to interpret the words, thou hast increased, or thou hast got much from us, and by us; and therefore, it is high time for thee to be gone from us.

The Philistines had asked Isaac to leave, so he did.

Isaac was not mightier in number. He just had God on his side. He was mightier in wealth and blessings of God.

Genesis 26:17 "And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there."

"And Isaac departed thence": At once, peaceably and quietly, though to his loss and disadvantage, without taking himself either to argument or arms, in favor of himself. He departed immediately, as soon as he perceived his abode was disagreeable to the king and his people; which gives us a very agreeable idea of the calm and peaceable disposition of Isaac.

"And pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there": At some distance from the city of Gerar, as Jarchi observes. Josephus says it was not far from it; but how far is not certain; very probably it was not out of the country, though on the borders of it.

Some render it, "the brook of Gerar". And interpret it, that he pitched his tent, and dwelt by it. The word used does signify a brook as well as a valley; and there was a brook of Gerar, which Solomon makes mention of.

Genesis 26:18 "And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them."

"And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father": This seems to refer to the same wells made mention of (in Genesis 26:15).

"For the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham": These were what Abraham's servants had dug, when he lived at Gerar, and which the Philistines did not stop during his life. But when he was dead and particularly out of envy to Isaac his son, whom they observed to prosper much, they stopped them up so that he might have no benefit of them.

"And he called their names after the names by which his father had called them": Which he did out of respect to his father, to preserve the memory of his name, as well as to make his title and claim to them the more dear and certain.

Genesis 26:19 "And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water."

"And Isaac's servants digged in the valley": In the valley of Gerar, as the Septuagint version expresses it.

"And found there a well of springing water": Or "living water", which continually flows, as Aben Ezra rightly interprets it. Hence this phrase is used of the perpetual and ever living graces of the Spirit of God (John 4:10).

Isaac left to keep from having trouble with these jealous-hearted people. He did not go far, just to the valley. Years before, his father's servants had digged wells and got abundant water here. In this area, a good well of water was as valuable as gold nuggets. The land was fertile, only very dry. Water made it like a Garden of Eden.

For spite, these wells had been plugged. How foolish, because they could have used the much-needed water. Isaac knew right where the good wells were, and had them dug anew. Not only did they find water in the well, but a flowing spring. With water, they would produce profusely.

Genesis 26:20 "And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water [is] ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him."

"And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen": About the well which was dug in the valley; and this shows it was near Gerar or at least was upon the border of the country, and so it was a disputable point to whom it belonged.

"Saying, the water is ours": Though the well was dug by Isaac's servants, yet they laid claim to the water, pretending it was their ground, being on their borders.

"And he called the name of the well Esek": which signifies "contention": the reason of the name follows: because they strove with him; wrangled, contended, and disputed with him about whose right it was.

The encampments such as "Esek" ("Contention"), and "Sitnah ("Enmity"); led to the spacious and fruitful place of Rehoboth ("Plenty of Room"). He had many struggles, but we can identify with him and hopefully see how God worked in the life of an average man.

You see these herdsmen of Gerar had this place all to themselves before Isaac came. They could have dug for water, but they did not. They waited until after Isaac's herdsmen dug the wells, and then claimed them. Had they been able to take them from Isaac's herdsmen, they would have probably, dried up.

Genesis 26:21 "And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah."

"And they digged another well": That is, Isaac's servants.

"And strove for that also": The herdsmen of Gerar disputed their right to that also, and strove to get it from them.

"And he called the name of it Sitnah": which signifies "hatred", it being out of hatred and malice to him that they gave him so much trouble. From this word, Satan has his name, and these men were of a diabolical spirit, envious, spiteful, and malicious.

Isaac was a man of God. He voluntarily moves to another spot, as we will see in the next verse. This reminds us of the Lord's teaching "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (Matthew chapter 5:40).

Genesis 26:22 "And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

“Rehoboth”: The word means “room enough.” Finally, a well was dug without a quarrel erupting (verses 20-21). Now that they were no longer perceived as encroaching upon another’s territory, Isaac selected an appropriate place-name which reflected how he saw God providentially working out their situation.

Isaac's patience paid off. God blessed him with another well. These other herdsmen had water now, so they left Isaac alone. Isaac gave God credit for finding the well. He realized wherever he went, God would bless him.

Genesis Chapter 26 Questions

1. What problem was in the land?
2. To whom did Isaac go?
3. Where?
4. God told Isaac not to go where?
5. What land had God promised Abraham?
6. What were these verses telling Isaac, that we could take heed of today?
7. What was his seed compared to for number?
8. What was a promise to the earth through Isaac? Why?
9. What was the first thing God told Abraham to do?
10. Where did Isaac dwell?
11. When the men of the city asked, what did he say about Rebekah?
12. Why did he not tell the truth?

13. What relation was Rebekah to Isaac, besides his wife?
14. What did Abimelech see to make him know Rebekah was Isaac's wife?
15. What would have brought guiltiness on the Philistines unknowingly?
16. What threat did Abimelech make to anyone who touched Rebekah or Isaac?
17. What did Isaac do to reap a hundred fold?
18. What three things did Isaac have that made him great in the sight of the Philistines?
19. What attitude did the Philistines have?
20. What happened to the wells Isaac's father's servants dug?
21. Why did Abimelech ask him to leave?
22. Where did he go?
23. What happened there twice?
24. What was as valuable as gold?
25. What was the name of the first two wells he dug?
26. What was the name of the third well?
27. What does it mean?