



Genesis - Chapter Twenty Six

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.b Genesis 25:19-36:43 - Isaac's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

God instructs Isaac to dwell in the region of Gerar due to a famine and also informed him that he had inherited the promises that God had made to Abraham. However, because he feared for his personal safety he told the local men that Rebekah was his sister, not his wife. However, Isaac was seen caressing Rebekah and Abimelech realised she was Isaac's wife. Therefore, he chastised Isaac severely for he knew that one of his men might have had sex with Rebekah and brought the wrath of God upon them all.

Isaac planted crops in the land and received a bountiful reward from God for his efforts. His wealth grew due to God's blessing upon him despite the deceit over Rebekah's status. However, Abimelech realised that Isaac was growing too strong for them, so he sent Isaac away into the valley of Gerar, where he dug wells for his livestock just as Abraham had done. The local herders quarrelled over the wells, causing Isaac to keep moving and digging other wells. Finally, Abimelech came to Isaac to sign a covenant with him at the well of Bee-sheba, promising no further conflict.

The chapter concludes with a brief account of Esau taking Hittite wives, which was a source of grief to his parents, Isaac and Rebekah.

II.b.iii Genesis 26:1-33 - Isaac and Abimelech

The events recorded in this section probably took place after the death of Abraham, when Esau and Jacob were young men. Much of this chapter closely resembles episodes from the life of Abraham. This chapter also confirms that the divine promises to Abraham are passed on to Isaac.

¹ Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. ² The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you.'

Genesis 26:1-2

Now there was a famine in the land. Although Isaac lived in the land God promised to his father Abraham and his descendants, it did not mean that life in the land would be without trouble or challenge. This remains the same for those who follow Jesus. Paul promises: <<**Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**>> (2 Timothy 3:12).

Besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. The narrator alludes to the famine mentioned in 12:10. On that occasion Abraham went down to Egypt. It seems that Isaac was taking the main road south from Canaan to Egypt because of the famine. However, he was instructed to remain in Gerar.

Abimelech. Since the events of this chapter are difficult to date precisely, it is possible that this is the same king mentioned in Chapters 20-21. It is perhaps more likely, however, that he is the son or grandson of the Abimelech known to Abraham. Some commentators even favour the name to be a title similar to Pharaoh rather than a personal name.

The use of the term Philistines here is generally taken to be anachronistic, since the name is normally associated with non-Canaanites from the Aegean region who inhabited southwest Canaan from about 1180 BC onward, nearly a thousand years after Abraham's time. In 1 Samuel the Philistines are portrayed as the main opponents of the Israelites. In light of this, the term may be used here and elsewhere to replace an earlier, obscure term; Genesis contains various examples of such modernisations. Alternatively, archaeological evidence from various sites in Canaan points to the possibility that some people from the Aegean region, especially Crete and Cyprus, may have already been settled in southwest Canaan. This raises the possibility that Abraham and Isaac had dealings with people who came from the same area as the later Philistines.

³ Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, ⁵ because Abraham

obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’

Genesis 26:3-5

Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you. The Lord instructs Isaac to remain in Canaan, with the promise that he will be blessed for doing so. God continually promises to be with his people, for example: <<He said, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain’>> (Exodus 3:12), <<He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob; nor has he seen trouble in Israel. The LORD their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them>> (Numbers 23:21), <<No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you>> (Joshua 1:5), and: <<Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD’s message, saying, I am with you, says the LORD>> (Haggai 1:13).

I will fulfil the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. This undoubtedly refers to the oath recorded in 22:16-18, the substance of which is repeated here. Not only is Isaac heir to the promises made by God to Abraham, but their fulfilment is intimately linked to him and his descendants: All the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring. This would later be confirmed by Peter: <<You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, “And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed”>> (Acts 3:25), and by Paul: <<And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you’>> (Galatians 3:8).

Because Abraham obeyed my voice. God said that he kept the covenant with Isaac because of Abraham’s obedience. A close look at Abraham’s life shows that his obedience was not complete or constant; yet God recognised and rewarded it.

Kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. The various terms used here, which are elsewhere often associated with the law and instructions given at Mount Sinai, underline that Abraham’s obedience to God was unreserved.

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘My wife,’ thinking, ‘or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance.’

Genesis 26:6-7

So Isaac settled in Gerar. Isaac obeyed God's warning and stayed in the land. Yet he lived among the people in Canaan, closer than he had before, and this would bring trouble.

She is my sister. Being new to the region of Gerar, Isaac adopts the same ruse that Abraham earlier used in both Egypt (12:10-12) and Gerar (20:1-18). He may well have been told of these accounts; if so he had not learned from them the need to trust in God alone and not to judge people in the way he did.

When Abraham referred to Sarah as his sister he was not lying for she was his half-sister. However, Rebekah was Isaac's cousin as well as his wife and not a sibling. Therefore, his claim is a blatant and deceitful lie. Despite his recent spiritual experience of God's call and his obedience to that call, Isaac now deliberately commits a sin due to his own human weakness.

⁸ When Isaac had been there a long time, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw him fondling his wife Rebekah. ⁹ So Abimelech called for Isaac, and said, 'So she is your wife! Why then did you say, "She is my sister"?' Isaac said to him, 'Because I thought I might die because of her.' ¹⁰ 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.' ¹¹ So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, 'Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death.'

Genesis 26:8-11

Saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. Some translations state laughing rather than fondling. In this context the Hebrew verb 'to laugh' implies laughing as they caress affectionately. The narrator deliberately chooses this verb to create a play on the name 'Isaac,' which means 'he laughs.' Abimelech sees Isaac 'being himself' with Rebekah and draws the obvious conclusion that they are married.

What is this you have done to us? In a similar manner to the rebuke of Pharaoh to Abraham (12:18-19) and of Abimelech's predecessor to Abraham (20:10), this ruler of Gerar rebuked Isaac for his deception.

Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death. Even as God protected his father, even in the midst of sinful conduct, Isaac was protected: <<*Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm*>> (Psalm 105:15).

¹² Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich; he

prospered more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.

Genesis 26:12-14

Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. This is truly a remarkable yield and not one that would normally be expected by any farmer on any land, yet Jesus recounts similar yields in the Parable of the Sower: <<*Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*>> (Matthew 13:8).

The LORD blessed him. Blessing is always an indication of divine favour. Consequently, Isaac became very wealthy: <<*But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today*>> (Deuteronomy 8:18). However, God's blessing is so much more than material wealth; in fact, many people are more blessed in their poverty than many are in their wealth. Isaac, like Abraham, was blessed in many ways.

He had possessions of flocks and herds that were probably inherited from Abraham: <<*Abraham gave all he had to Isaac*>> (Genesis 25:5).

The Philistines envied him. Isaac's prosperity prompted the envy of his neighbours. This was another problem that came from living in close company to the people of Gerar.

¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped up and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us.'

Genesis 26:15-16

The Philistines may have closed up the wells to discourage semi-nomadic herdsmen from grazing their livestock in this region. It seems that their actions may have been a deliberate attempt to see the Hebrews leave their land.

Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us. In addition to the wealth he had accumulated in both monetary terms and in livestock, Isaac and his group of servants were so numerous that Abimelech saw them as a threat to his land and his people. This was something that the Egyptians would later fear also: <<*He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we*>> (Exodus 1:9), something later recognised by the psalmist: <<*And the LORD made his people very fruitful, and made them*

stronger than their foes, whose hearts he then turned to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants>> (Psalm 105:24-25).

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there.

Genesis 26:17

Isaac relocates from the city of Gerar to the valley of Gerar, a region under the control of Gerar but not adjacent to the city.

¹⁸ Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham; for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names that his father had given them. ¹⁹ But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰ the herders of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herders, saying, 'The water is ours.' So he called the well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarrelled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah. ²² He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'

Genesis 26:18-22

Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham. Isaac went back to the same resources that had sustained his father and all he possessed. It took faith, work and commitment to dig the wells again, but the provision was there when Isaac sought it diligently. For nomadic herdsman, even great ones like Abraham and Isaac, water was life. In some seasons of the year, human or animal life could not be sustained without water from wells. These wells were not a luxury, they were a necessity.

There is a powerful illustration here of the spiritual life. The spiritual resources that sustained previous generations are available for believers today, if they are prepared seek them with faith, work and commitment.

When Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water. It seems that Isaac even found something that Abraham had not. Isaac found the best kind of well - one of running water. This was the best kind of provision, which came to Isaac as he received the provision once enjoyed by his father Abraham.

Since water was a vital commodity in this arid region, disputes over the ownership of wells were common (21:25). The names of the wells, Esek (contention), Sitnah

(enmity), and Rehoboth (broad places or room), reflect the events associated with each of them.

²³ From there he went up to Beer-sheba. ²⁴ And that very 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 and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham's sake.' ²⁵ So he built an altar there, called on the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Genesis 26:23-25

And that very night the LORD appeared to him. Abraham had many personal appearances of the Lord. This seems to be the first such experience for Isaac.

Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham's sake. In the atmosphere of greater contention between Isaac's herdsmen and the Philistine herdsmen, Isaac had reason to be afraid. Here God told Isaac to put any such fears away. God had made a similar statement during one of his appearances to Abraham: <<*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'*>> (Genesis 15:1). God kept his covenant with Isaac for Abraham's sake. After the same pattern, God keeps his covenant with believers for Jesus' sake.

So he built an altar there, called on the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there. Isaac walked in the same paths of his father Abraham. Altars and tents marked Abraham's life, demonstrating a life of worship and trust. Isaac also lived that same lifestyle, calling on the name of the Lord: <<*Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls*>> (Joel 2:32).

Isaac's servants dug a well. Years earlier Abraham had dug a well at Beer-sheba (21:30), but it was later filled in by the Philistines (v.15).

²⁶ Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. ²⁷ Isaac said to them, 'Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?' ²⁸ They said, 'We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you ²⁹ so 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.' ³⁰ So he

made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

Genesis 26:26-31

Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you? Isaac's question was logical. He was pushed out of Gerar by the contention of the herdsmen of Gerar. He had every reason to believe he was not welcome

However, Abimelech comes to Isaac in order to establish a covenant or treaty with him, guaranteeing peaceful coexistence. This arises from a change of heart by Abimelech, who now acknowledges the Lord's presence with Isaac: We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. A similar treaty was made in the time of Abraham (Genesis 21:22-32).

Phicol is possibly the same individual mentioned in Genesis 21:22. Alternatively, Phicol could be a family name or title and here refer to someone else.

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!' ³³ He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

Genesis 26:32-33

That same day. The ratification of the treaty coincides with the discovery of water in a well being dug by Isaac's servants. Consequently, the well is called Shibah, Hebrew *shib'ah*, which resembles the Hebrew word for oath, *shebu'ah*.

Beer-sheba probably means 'well of seven' and is related to a gift that Abraham gave to Abimelech to mark their covenant. Refer to the comment on 21:31.

II.b.iv Genesis 26:34-35 - Esau's Hittite Wives

This brief passage indicates how Esau deliberately married local women rather than take a wife from his own people, which deeply grieved his parents.

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵ and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 26:34-35

By emphasising the Hittite origin of Esau's wives probably implies that Esau has not chosen them wisely and had gone against the protocol established by Abraham, who had sought Rebekah for Isaac. This is confirmed by the observation that they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. There will be more information given on this in later chapters: <<*So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had*>> (Genesis 28:8-9), and: <<*Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah daughter of Anah son of Zibeon the Hivite, and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth*>> (Genesis 36:2-3).