
God with Us

Genesis 26

Introduction God is everywhere. The truth of the omnipresence of God is clearly taught in the Bible and confessed by true Christians everywhere. Kent Hughes points out that we need to remember that all of God is in everywhere (Hughes, *Genesis*, p.339-340). He is not like atmosphere a portion of which is in this room and another portion of which is in the lobby. All of God is everywhere. This is because God is our ultimate environment. It is “in Him that we live and move and have our being,” Paul told the philosophers of Athens.

But God has also declared that His people are to think of Him as being with them in a way that is greater, more special and more comforting than His omnipresence. We are not just in the presence of God. We are the special objects of His interest. We all know this. We have all had the experience of being present in a room with someone while not being the object of their interest. So, while God is omnipresent – He is everywhere – He is also with His people in a special way.

One my mentors in exposition is a man named R.C. (Dick) Lucas. His Lucas Lessons have helped many expositors think through texts. One of those lessons is called *Shape up!* Dick reminds us to use the text to provide us with its own structure when it is there. For example, the Psalms are broken down into stanzas for a reason. Our preaching on the Psalms should be “stanzafied”. Moses gives us three repeated phrases that structure the logic, the ideas, the flow of this text. They are huge spotlights illuminating the truth that Isaac, the people of Israel and all of us need to learn. In verse 3 God promises for the future that He will be with Isaac. In verse 24, God promises for the present that He will be with Isaac. Finally, in verse 28, the ungodly recognize that God was with Isaac in the past.

So, while Isaac is the recipient of the covenant, he is now walking in Abraham’s steps. Sometimes he does so in faith and sometimes in folly. Moses clearly intends to set this narrative as a parallel to that of Abraham’s in Genesis 20-21. God had promised to be with him; now, how would he live if that promise is true?

We, Isaac, Israel and all of us need to learn that God will be with us:

In our sojourn here on earth;

In our struggles and hardships;

In our being recognized as under the special care of God.

Let’s think then about what it means for *God to be with us*.

In our Pilgrimage**(v.1-5)**

Key Verse: *Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you (v.3)*

Moses opens with a clear allusion to the Abraham narratives earlier. In the context of Esau rejecting his birthright, Moses shows us Isaac enjoying the privileges of that birthright. He is walking in Abraham's steps (even to a bad degree) and is receiving the covenantal care and blessing of God.

With its Challenges**(v.1)**

But that experience comes in the midst of real life with its own challenges. Here is Isaac living in the Promised Land. Yet, there, a famine comes. The water dries up, the flocks struggle and the crops fail. Having inherited all of Abraham's wealth, he now has to decide what to do. He moves into the region where the Abimelech rules, where Abraham had last gone during famine.

With God's Commands**(v.2)**

Having made this move, he is met by God who gives him commands. Those commands are related to his present situation. Do not go down to Egypt. Live as a pilgrim here in this land. So Isaac has the challenges of life. He also has the clear commands of God as to what he is to do and not do.

With God's Covenants**(v.3-5)**

Finally, God affirms His covenant with Isaac. God will keep His word to Abraham and has transferred the covenant to Isaac. Here we see the four major elements in this great covenant.

God will bless Isaac and His people.

God will give them all the land He has promised.

God will give him descendants that cannot be counted.

God will bless all the nations of the earth through him.

So he is to sojourn in the land of Abimelech with God's precepts and promises. God's precepts guide and guard his walk so that obedience is called for. God's promises enable and encourage his walk so that he will delight in God and persevere.

This snapshot of Isaac's life holds true for all of God's people. It does for you as well. You have entered the promised land at your conversion for you are in the kingdom of God, the new realm where you are a new creature. But, this is not the new heavens and the new earth yet. We are still living in a fallen and futile world where there is disease, difficulty and decline. But, we have the clear Word of God as sufficient for our lives. We have His precepts for our duty and His promises for our delight. At the core of both is the promise of God's presence with us. He is with us when we struggle with persecution and prosperity (Hebrews 13) and when we work hard to spread the good news to all the people groups (Matthew 28).

In our Problems

(v.6-25)

Key Verse: *Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you* (v.24)

Well, this all sounds so very good – but what about the real life you live where you sin and others sin against you? Once again, the core of faith is that we trust and do not tremble.

When Others Seem to Threaten

(v.6-11)

Isaac, as his father did before him, fears for his life. He believes he is in danger because of the beauty of his wife. So, following his father's footsteps, he lies and says that Rebekah is his sister. Now, Abraham may have some excuse for saying this because Sarah was his half-sister. But Isaac has not such rationale. He simply falls back on a human strategy rather than resting on God's promises.

Now this was not a momentary lapse that was soon corrected. Moses relates that they had been there a long time. Rebekah has at least not become a part of the king's harem. However, they had become careless in maintaining their deceit. In fact, they were caught by the king himself. Do you sense the finger of God moving? Now look, the ESV is being bit coy here - Abimelech looked out and saw Isaac and Rebekah doing something that clearly indicated they were not just brother and sister. They were intimate.

So, Isaac is called to account. His explanation rings like Abraham's did when he was caught. And once again, the pagan, Gentile king is the instrument in the humbling, convicting work of God. He recognizes that choices have consequences. I am sure that the history of Abraham is ringing in Abimelech's heart. He knows that God will judge. There will be guilt and there will be consequences. So he publishes a protection order – no one is touch Isaac and Rebekah.

When Others are Jealous

(v.12-16)

God then blesses Isaac with a huge harvest. All that he touches turns to gold. In the environment of personal protection and God's grand blessings, he becomes tremendously wealthy. Now this new wealth is in addition to what he had already acquired. Along with this prosperity comes enormous power.

But he is envied. The Philistines are jealous of all that he has. The king is afraid that he will exert his power, possibly to overthrow him. Isaac is now a threat; therefore the king takes direct measures. So, the man of God, experiencing the blessing of God even in his own failures, is now expelled from the land. Abimelech sees Isaac as threat. He demands that he leave even acknowledging that Isaac is the greater.

When Others Steal

(v.17-25)

When Isaac departs, he settles into the land of Gerar. It seems that he goes here because this is the land given to Abraham because of the wells he had dug. In violation of the covenant between Abraham and the Abimelech, the Philistines had stopped up those wells by filling them with dirt. Isaac now comes and re-digs those same wells again, finding water in them.

The Philistine shepherds declare that the wells are theirs. Now that the wells are unstopped and filled with water, they want them. They fight with Isaac's shepherds over the wells. They are in fact, trying to steal them. They do not acknowledge the covenant that was made.

Now it is hard to tell whether Isaac is a godly peacemaker or a weak coward. When the Philistine shepherds pilfer his wells, he simply seems to move on. Is this "As much lies with you, live peaceably with all men?" Or is he simply a weak man, unable and unwilling to confront sin? The Bible at this point is not clear. It neither condemns nor condones his actions. He simply names the well so as to give it a lasting memory of being stolen. Then he moves on to dig another, only to have it happen all over again. Finally, he digs a well over which they do not fight. There, he names the well and praises God. He declares that God has made a place for them and they will be fruitful.

He journeys a bit further to a place later called Beersheba. Here, God meets him and speaks to him. God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham. But then look at what God says, "Fear not, for I am [present tense] with you and will bless you [future tense]." (v.24) God puts the finger on the problem in Isaac's life during this time – he controlled by the fear of man.

You see, God had told him as he entered this place and time that God would be with him. God's special covenant care would be his as he received the birthright from Abraham. Yet, he is afraid for his life, fearful of their threats and unwilling to confront their theft. Isaac has done what God said; he lived in the land and prospered. But he has not believed the promise of God in such a way that changes his heart. He is fearful.

Obedying the precepts of God are not enough. You must also rest in the promises of God. Faith is not equal to obedience. Faith is believing God, His precepts and promises, in such a way that you obey with courage, conviction and persistence. It is wonderful to see God here with Isaac, with Israel and her leaders and Jesus with His disciples encouraging them not to be fearful, but rather to be strong of good courage because God is with them.

So, what about you? Do you believe that God is with you, not just in His omnipresence, but in His special attending care? Does this change the way you respond to life's problems? Do you tremble in circumstances or before people? Or do you rest with quiet confidence and persevering obedience? Sin teaches our hearts to fear; Scriptures teach our hearts to trust.

In our Promotions

(v.26-33)

Key Verse: *We see plainly that the Lord has been with you.* (v.28)

This is not the end of our story. What a grand thing it is when, even sometimes in our own failures, God is able to shine so brightly that others can't help but see Him!

Recognition of God's Blessing

Abimelech and Phicol come to meet with Isaac. Phicol is a chief of shepherds responsible for enforcing the grazing and well rights by military force (*The New Bible Commentary*, Logos Edition). Isaac is naturally suspicious. What more could they want now? They have expelled him from their lands. They had ruined and then robbed him of his wells. So what pain and trouble are they here to inflict?

Ah, but they are here humbled by the greatness of God for Isaac's good. They have seen all that God has done for Isaac, in spite of Isaac's disobedience and failure. They now have come to acknowledge that Isaac has the special attention and care of God. This is evidence in Isaac's conduct over the wells and God's great blessing of him. I love the way the ESV puts this, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you." (v.28)

What is striking here is that this text is in the immediate context of Esau rejecting his birthright. Abimelech and Phicol see what Esau does not. Esau has turned away from God's covenant, God's blessing, God's promises and therefore God himself. Isaac is experiencing the blessing, public to unbelievers, which Esau has rejected. Moses puts this text here, not as an interlude or as an insertion, but to highlight the very great importance of God's presence with His people in the covenant. You cannot despise the birthright and its covenant without despising the God of the birthright and His blessing. This is why Hebrews calls Esau, "profane". Abimelech and Phicol may be Gentiles, but Esau is family. Yet, he is profane. He does not see or value what is plain to others.

What a great thing it is when, in the eyes of unbelievers, God's people are clearly under the special care of God. They may be experiencing trials and difficulties. They may be experiencing great blessing and prosperity. But however God chooses to show Himself through His people, it is to bring honor and praise to Himself. In this vein, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that it is not supernatural manifestations but rather the preaching of the Word exposing the hearts of unbelievers that causes them to fall down and acknowledge that God is surely there (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Relationship with God's People

For Isaac, this meant that conflict with his neighbors would cease. They make a treaty, secured with oaths and celebrated with a feast. The Philistine leadership has acknowledged God and established a relationship of peace with Isaac. But notice that it is still self-serving. Look carefully at what the declaration said: "*So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 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.*" (v.28-29, ESV). Do you see it? They saw clearly that God was with Isaac and he was blessed by

God. So, let's get him to make an oath not to harm the Philistines and to declare that they had always treated him well, referring only to the events surround his wife. But they have totally ignored all their own sin against him in ignoring the covenant with Abraham, destroying and stealing what was not theirs. Unfortunately, this is often as it is. Unbelievers sometimes acknowledge God. But often it is for their own benefit to serve their own agendas, to attempt to shield themselves from the consequences of their sins. Do they clearly see God is with His people? Yes. Do they acknowledge it in self-serving ways? Yes. Be glad for the one and cautious over the other.

This then encourages us that the way we conduct ourselves in the presence of unbelievers may be a witness to them and bring them to peace with God. While we do not live as though unbelievers govern our conduct, our walk with God may well point them to the Lord. Paul says that putting others first becomes the light we hold out in darkness so that all may see the gospel in death and resurrection (Philippians 2).

So God is with us:

Lessons

We have Jesus' promise of His special presence till the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). So do not hesitate, doubt or despair. We serve the Lord until the kingdom fills all the earth and the King returns.

We have the promise of God's special presence in care and sustenance as all we need (Hebrews 13:5-6). So in hardship, difficulty, personal sin, financial struggle, bodily illness we have all we need. In persecution, threats, being sinned against, we will not fear. We have God; that's all we need.

What a dire thing it is when those who are familiar and family – those who are around Christian things all the time – despise and reject God by despising and rejecting the things of God. Now I am going to speak plainly to some of you and particularly some of our young people. Some of you are heading down Esau's path. You are not recognizing the greatness of what God has given in the gospel and in this church fellowship. You are despising it and rejecting it. Careful, lest in turning away you are turning away from God.

What a delight when our walk with God and our engagement with the world around us bring people to acknowledge that God is with us. I know that this is what we all hunger and aim for. O that all over our neighborhoods and all through the nations, men and women, boys and girls will bow to Jesus having clearly seen that *God is with us*.