

Genesis 26:1-33
Psalm 65
John 4:1-42

“The Blessing of Isaac”

September 13, 2009

Throughout this chapter you hear how God blessed Isaac with crops, and flocks and herds.
The only way this happens is through water.

The opening verses of chapter 26 tell us that there was *another* famine.
When famine comes people get pretty fussy about water.

During good times a sojourner might be welcome.
But when food and water are running short,
the sojourner will be the first one chased out of the land.

Abraham had gone to Egypt to escape famine
(the Nile River made Egypt *almost* famine-proof).

But Isaac is told to stay in the land.
And everywhere he goes, he finds water.

Psalm 65 is a harvest Psalm –
a song of praise to God for his abundant provision.
And it speaks of God’s provision of water
as one of the great blessings of God to his people.

Sing Psalm 65
John 4:1-42

Jesus says that he will give living water to those who believe in him.
What does he mean?
The one who drinks of the water Jesus gives will never be thirsty again!
What does Jesus means?

Genesis 26 helps us to understand.

Book 8 of Genesis – the Generations of Isaac
takes us from Genesis 25 to Genesis 35,
and shows us how the blessing of Abraham comes to Jacob.

Genesis 26 is really the one chapter of Genesis that is all about Isaac.
And everything in this chapter is an echo of Abraham.
And that is the point.

In Genesis 12 God called Abraham and declares to him his promise.
Here God calls Isaac and declares to him his promise.
In Genesis 12 (and 21) Abraham feared for the loss of his wife and so deceived kings.

Here Isaac fears the loss of his wife and so deceives a king.
In Genesis 13 Abraham's men quarrel with Lot's men over land
(and in Gen 21 with Abimelech's men over wells),
Here Isaac's men do the same.
And in Genesis 21 Abraham enters into a treaty with Abimelech at Beersheba.
Here Isaac enters into a treaty with Abimelech at Beersheba.

And if all of these structural parallels were not enough,
you also have the key words: “blessing” – used four times (3, 12, 24, 29)
and “Abraham his father” (or equivalent) used five times (3, 5, 15, 18, 24).

The point of the story is that Isaac inherits the blessing of Abraham.

It is a story in three movements
as Isaac sojourns in Gerar, and then the Valley of Gerar, and finally in Beersheba.

You will notice that the first and third movements have parallel structures,
while all three movements emphasize the similarity between Abraham and Isaac.

1. Isaac in Gerar (26:1-16)

a. God Speaks: “To You and Your Seed I Will Give All These Lands” (v1-5)

*Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham.
And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines.*

When did this happen?

No doubt this happened before the birth of the twins.
After all, if Isaac and Rebekah show up with twin boys,
it would be a lot harder to sell the “she’s my sister” story!

This indicates that the author of Genesis is structuring his narrative very intentionally –
arranging events not according to chronology, but according to a literary pattern.
Last time we looked at the chiastic pattern of Genesis 25-35
(book 8 of Genesis – the Generations of Isaac).

When famine had come in the days of Abraham,
Abraham had gone to Egypt.
When famine comes in the days of Jacob,
Jacob will go to Egypt.

But when famine comes in the days of Isaac,
the LORD says “Do not go down to Egypt.”

Remember what we have seen:
Isaac will never leave the land.
He has returned from death and will dwell in the land for the rest of his life.

And so Isaac stays in the land
and goes to Abimelech in Gerar.

We should also note that it is unlikely that these are the same people
as the Philistines that live in the land in the days of the Judges.

Most likely they are called Philistines
because they live in the region where the Philistines later dwelt

2 And the LORD appeared to him and said,

“Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.

3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you,

for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands,

and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven

and will give to your offspring all these lands.

And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge,

my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

Abraham had been a sojourner – a “gur” in Gerar –

now Isaac is told that if he will live as a sojourner, as a pilgrim in the land,
then God will be with him.

Notice how verses 3-5 are set up:

Verse 3 promises God’s presence – I will be with you and I will bless you.
God’s presence is at the heart of his covenant.

“I will be with you.”

Immanuel – God with us –

this is at the heart of God’s covenant.

God will be present with his people.

What will God’s presence and blessing accomplish?

First, to you and your offspring I will give all these lands (v3).

There’s the LAND.

Second, I will multiply your offspring (v4).

There’s the SEED.

(And remember that at the moment Isaac has no children!)

Third, in your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed (v4).

There’s the BLESSING TO THE NATIONS.

This the Abrahamic blessing that is now pronounced upon Isaac.

But don’t ignore verse 5.

Why will all this happen?

Because Abraham obeyed my voice.

And not only that.

Because Abraham obeyed by law – my Torah.
In other words, Abraham obeyed the Mosaic law!

“my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

But God hadn’t given the Mosaic law yet!
How could Moses obey it if it hadn’t been given?!

Genesis is part of the Pentateuch –
it is part of the Five Books of Moses.
And these words are used later in Deuteronomy 11 to refer to the Mosaic Law.
When Israel hears Genesis 26:5, they would hear that Abraham kept Torah.

Notice also that it does not say that Abraham *lived* by the law –
it says that Abraham *kept* the law.
Abraham does not become righteous because he keeps the law.
Rather, Abraham keeps the law because he is righteous!

Some have tried to drive a wedge between two different Abrahamic covenants:
the unconditional covenant of Genesis 12 and 15
 where God promises to fulfill the covenant
and the conditional covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17
 where God calls Abraham to walk before him and be blameless.

Genesis 26, however, will not allow God’s covenant with Abraham to be divided into two.
Here in verses 1-5 you hear of God’s promise to Abraham:
 Land, Seed, and Blessing to the nations – Genesis 12 and 15,
 but you also hear the conditions – like Genesis 17.
Not only will God do this “because Abraham obeyed my voice”
 but also God will do this *if* Isaac remains in the land.

God will do what he has promised *unconditionally* –
 if Abraham and Isaac keep covenant.

So which is it?
Is the covenant conditional or unconditional?
There are two pitfalls that you must avoid:
 There is the legalistic trap that emphasizes the conditions
 The legalist says, “God will keep his end of the bargain,
 if you keep yours.”
 but this turns the gospel into a deadly burden.
 You must not downplay the unconditional.
 God *will* do what he has promised.
 There is nothing that Abraham and Isaac can do
 to bring about the fulfillment of the promise.

It is God's promise and *he* will do it.
But there is also the antinomian trap that overemphasizes the unconditional.
The antinomian says "hey, God has done it all in Jesus,
so you don't have to do a thing!"
But if you remove the conditions altogether,
then you wind up with, "hey, let's sin some more
so that grace can abound!"
You must not downplay the conditional!
You must walk before God and be blameless!

What we see repeatedly throughout the scriptures
is that the conditional and the unconditional go together:
God will accomplish his sovereign purpose.
There is *nothing* that you can do to save yourself.
But when God has saved you –
then he calls you to walk before him and be blameless.

It is called a necessary subsequent condition.

It must follow.
And indeed, by the grace of God, it *will* follow!

It is necessary (as Hebrews 12 says,
we are to strive after that holiness *without which no one will see God*.
Holiness is *not* optional!).
But it is also *subsequent* –
it is not that we first loved God, but that he loved us and gave his Son
as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Why do I emphasize this?

Because what you *say* you believe
needs to become the basis for how you act.
We say "Jesus is Lord."
Is he Lord when you speak to your children?
Is he Lord when you sit down in front of your computer?
Is he Lord when you relate to your colleagues at work?

God is now present with us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

God *is* with you.
What will that mean for you this week?

God says that Abraham obeyed.

And now Isaac demonstrates that he is a worthy heir to his father.

b. **Isaac Is Like Abraham: "She Is My Sister" (v6-11)**
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 feared to say, “My wife,” thinking,
“lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,”
because she was attractive in appearance.*

*8 When he had been there a long time,
Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window
and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.*

Isaac is laughing.

Remember that Isaac's name means "laughter."

When his birth was announced to Abram, he laughed.
When his birth was announced to Sarai, she laughed.
After he was born, Ishmael laughed with him.
Now Laughter is laughing with Rebekah.

We cannot help but think of David and Bathsheba when we read this.

Like David, this Philistine king looked out of his window and saw a beautiful woman.
But Abimelech fears God more than David did!

9 So Abimelech called Isaac and said,

*“Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister’?”
Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I 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 surely be put to death.”

Once again the Philistine king proves that he fears God.

Even as Abraham had misjudged the Abimelech of his day,
so also Isaac misjudges this Abimelech.

c. The Blessing of Abraham: Crops and Herds (v12-16)

12 And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold.

This is the first indication that we have of the patriarchs planting crops.
They are usually shepherds and herdsmen.

But think back to Genesis 2.

In the beginning, when God had created the heavens and the earth,
why was there no cultivated grain?

Two reasons:

there was no rain – and there was no man.

And so God sent a mist to water the earth,
and then he planted a garden, and created Adam to be the gardener –

the one who was to plant and harvest and make crops grow!

Isaac is the second Adam – the one who plants crops and reaps 100 fold –
a ridiculously high yield (especially for the first year!).

And remember, this is in the midst of a famine.

There is a famine in the land, and Isaac is reaping 100 fold in the same year!

And so already we see the firstfruits of God's blessing of Isaac.

A few weeks ago in the evening service we heard Jesus' parable of the seed.

Jesus says that the seed that falls on the good soil
produces 30, 60 and 100 fold.

Isaac is the good soil.

He hears the Word of the LORD
and the Word of the LORD produces good fruit in him.

Truly, the LORD was with him!

*The LORD blessed him, 13 and the man became rich,
and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.*

*14 He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants,
so that the Philistines envied him.*

*15 (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth
all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.)*

16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

2. Isaac in the Valley of Gerar (26:17-22)

a. Isaac Is Like Abraham: Conflict over Water (v17-22)

17 So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.

*18 And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father,
which the Philistines had stopped 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,

"Spring water" is literally "living water" – a phrase that means "moving water" –
as opposed to stagnant water

Remember this, because Jesus will come to a well – a different well – in the north.

And Jesus will speak of the importance of "living water."

*20 the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying,
"The water is ours."*

So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him.

*21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also,
so he called its name Sitnah.*

*22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it.
So he called its name Rehoboth, saying,
“For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”*

Back in Genesis 21:25 we heard that Abraham had similar trouble with Abimelech's herdsmen.

But while the herdsmen of Gerar are quarrelsome and contentious,
we should notice that the blessing of Isaac comes to them.
They quarrel and contend with Isaac –
but at the end of the day it was God's blessing of Isaac (the water)
that comes to them.

Isaac's servants just keep digging wells – and they keep finding water –
until at Rehoboth Isaac finds a place where there is room enough to dwell.

God promised that he would be with Isaac.

God promised that he would bless him.

And that blessing is found in the provision of water for Isaac –
and for the nations.

3. Isaac in Beersheba (26:23-33)

a. The LORD Speaks: “I Am with You and Will Bless and Multiply Your Seed” (v23-25)

23 From there he went up to Beersheba.

*24 And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said,
“I am the God of Abraham your father.*

*Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring
for my servant Abraham's sake.”*

Notice again what is at the heart of God's promise:

“I am with you” – the presence of God

Here we see the already and the not yet of Isaac's life of faith.

God said earlier “I will be with you” –
and that his presence would be demonstrated by
land, seed, and the blessing to the nations.

Well, the nations are getting blessed by all the wells Isaac is digging –
but otherwise Isaac isn't seeing much of God's presence.

Sure, he's got a lot of “stuff” –
but the important things – Land and Seed –
just aren't there!

By Yahweh says to him, “Fear not.”
Do not be afraid.

I will do what I have promised to my servant Abraham.

“My servant” is a title reserved for the very greatest of God’s people:

Moses (Dt 34:5), Joshua (Josh 24:29), Caleb (Num 14:24), David (2 Sam 7:8)
are named “servants” by name.

There is also “Israel, my Servant” in Isaiah,
the suffering Servant of the LORD who is later revealed to be our Lord Jesus.

But there are very few who are called “my servant” by name.

*25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there.
And there Isaac's servants dug a well.*

Beersheba means “Well of the Oath.”

Abraham had dug a well at Beersheba and built an altar there.

Now Isaac digs a well and builds an altar at Beersheba.

And like Abraham, it is here at the Well of the Oath that Abimelech comes to make a treaty.

b. Isaac Is Like Abraham: Philistines Acknowledge Yahweh’s Blessing (v26-31)

*26 When 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 said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us,
and let us make a covenant with you,*

*29 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.*

Technically this is true.

They may be jealous of him

but they have done him no harm –

they merely chased him away!

But they acknowledge:

You are now the blessed of the Lord.”

Abimelech’s people had persecuted Isaac by chasing him away.

This should have resulted in the depletion of Isaac’s herds and flocks.

His wealth should have died in the stony hills.

But instead he keeps finding water!

So they come to him, wanting to make sure that if there is ever any trouble,

Isaac will not fight against them!

After all, someone so blessed by his God would surely be trouble in a fight!

(Perhaps they remember stories about the sojourner Abraham

 who routed mighty kings with 300 trained servants!)

Since Isaac is now “the blessed of Yahweh”

 they want to make sure that he is on *their* side in a fight!

And so Isaac makes them a feast.

The fact that they accept this means that this king considers Isaac to be (at least) his equal.

30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

31 In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths.

And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

Proverbs 16:7 says

“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD,

 he makes even his enemies sue for peace with him.”

Perhaps Proverbs was thinking of Isaac!

But I cannot help thinking of Psalm 2

with its call for the kings of the earth to be wise and serve the LORD with fear,

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,

 for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” (2:12)

Abimelech comes and humbles himself before Isaac –

he seeks peace with Isaac, knowing that one so blessed of Yahweh

 would make a deadly enemy!

You do not want the Seed of Abraham arrayed against you!

And as if in confirmation that Isaac is truly the Seed of Abraham

(in case you had any doubts left!)...

c. The Blessing of Abraham: the Well of the Oath (v32-33)

*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 Beersheba to this day.

Beersheba – the Well of the Oath –

was the place where both Abraham and Isaac made covenants with Abimelechs –
the place where some small part of the blessing to Abraham came to the nations.

And that’s why it is not surprising that it was at a well that Jesus met the Samaritan woman.

Jacob’s well is nowhere near Beersheba,

but as Isaac's servants found living water in the wells of Canaan,
so also Jesus promises living water to the woman.

And that living water now flows from the heart of Jesus to his people.

That living water is the life-giving Spirit whom Jesus has poured out upon us.

*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink,
whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”* (John 7:37-38)

Jesus has come to bring living water.

But as the one who brings living water,
he is also the one who brings an abundant harvest!

Jesus says in John 4:35-38
that the fields are white for harvest.
Isaac was the first of the patriarchs to reap an abundant harvest
as the second Adam.
But of course, Isaac was only a picture of the second Adam.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the gardener who brings the blessing of Abraham to the nations.

Psalm 27:1-5, 11-13