

Isaac Gets Abraham's Blessing
Genesis 26

Turn to Genesis 26 please. This is another one of our Genesis stories. Perhaps we should call these First Family Stories. The Genesis stories are all family stories. Three fourths of Genesis tells the story of Abraham's family, and through Christ by faith we've been grafted into that family. So Abraham's family is also our first family.

These stories cover four generations: 1, Abraham and Sarah; 2, their son Isaac, and Rebekah; 3, Isaac and Rebekah's son Jacob, and his two wives, Leah and Rachel; and 4, the 12 sons of Jacob and his wives. Four generations, good and bad action between husbands and wives, good and bad between parents and children, and good and bad between siblings, usually brothers.

These stories are the foundation of Israelite faith, and therefore also the foundation of our faith. They are not simply colourful old stories. They are colourful old stories, but they lay down the bedrock of how God deals with the people he blesses. Spiritually, these are *our* ancestors. We have been blessed with their blessing, we walk in their steps.

Are these model families? No. Ideal families? No. They are families with troubles, hard times, and sins. They are not horrible families, but they have troubles and sins. And God's blessing continued in and through those families, in spite of their failings, and through their failings. And they continued to trust God, and their lives show that clearly.

These stories show us how God deals with his people. So let's not be reluctant to put ourselves in these stories. Society has changed much, but people have not changed, and neither has God.

Now to Genesis 26: the first paragraph of Gen 26 tells us what God said to Isaac. It also names his father Abraham three times, and the rest of the chapter names Abraham five more times. God is telling us to connect what he did earlier, with Abraham, to what he's doing now, with Isaac.

God came to Abraham out of the blue, as near as we can tell, in Genesis 12. His parents and extended family did not serve God. But God did not come to Isaac that way. God came to Isaac to continue what God began with Abraham.

The Genesis 26 stories teach a simple truth, that God blessed Abraham's son Isaac just as he had blessed Abraham. But when we're dealing with real families in real times and places, it is never quite that simple. So we get a story with several parts. The Genesis 26 story has five parts.

1, God Promises Abraham's Blessing to Isaac – 26:1-6

There was a famine where Isaac and Rebekah were living, just like happened to Abraham. So Isaac and Rebekah moved to where the Philistines lived, not too far. There the Lord appeared to Isaac, and said, “Don’t go to Egypt because of this famine. Live where I tell you to live. Stay where you, and I will be with you and bless you here.”

When God first came to Isaac’s father Abraham, he told Abraham to pack up and move, which Abraham did. But God tells Isaac to stay where he is. “Because,” said God, “I will give all these lands to you and your descendants, and I’ll give you many descendants, like the stars in the sky, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”

“Why will I do this? I’m doing this for *you* because *your father Abraham* obeyed me, and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees, and my instructions.” Wow.

We need to catch this for a few reasons. One, Abraham was good, but he also failed a few times. But, Abraham’s basic direction was to honour God, and his life showed that. To God, Abraham was wonderful. Maybe God is not as hard on us as we think he is: *Abraham obeyed me, and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees, and my instructions.*

When God promises to bless us, it comes with responsibility. God promised to bless Abraham, but Abraham had to leave his family, move away. Mostly God wants us to do what is just and right, be good to people. God promised to bless Abraham, and took care of him, and Abraham lived obediently in God’s ways. Not perfectly, at all, but still, Abraham was devoted to God.

Why will God bless Isaac? Because his father Abraham was devoted to God. In a sense, blessing Isaac was God’s reward to Abraham, and God made that clear. So, Isaac obeyed God, they stayed where they were with the Philistines.

2, Rebekah is my Sister – 26:7-11

When the men around there asked Isaac about Rebekah, he said “she is my sister.” He did this because he was afraid. The Bible tells us what Isaac thought to himself: “The men of this place might kill me because of Rebekah, because she is beautiful.” This all sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Abraham did this to Sarah at least twice.

This must have happened before Jacob and Esau were born. This deceit would not work if they had two little boys running around. They were married twenty years before the twins were born, so we assume this is in those twenty years.

One day Abimelek, king of the Philistines, looked out his window and saw Isaac carrying on with Rebekah. Caressing her. Some kind of public display of affection, things a brother and sister would not do. They are married and can’t always keep their hands off each other. Good for them.

Abimelek called Isaac in. “She’s your wife, Isaac! Why did you lie? Why did you say Rebekah’s your sister?” Isaac was honest: “I thought I might lose my life on account of her.”

Abimelek was offended and horrified. “What have you done to us? One of us might have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on all of us!” Abimelek knew that men should leave a married woman alone. He ordered all his people, “Anyone who harms this man or this woman will surely be put to death.”

Isaac did not behave well. He lied to save himself, he put his wife at great risk, and he put the Philistines in danger too, which their king could feel. And it was unnecessary. Once the Philistines know that Isaac and Rebekah are married, they respect that. What we need to see is that even though Isaac was faithless and disobedient, God still took care of him and Rebekah.

God had just promised Isaac to stay here with the Philistines, “and I will be with you and bless you.” For Isaac, when he was frightened, there was suddenly no God in his picture. That promise disappeared. In the Bible, the problem with fear is not that we feel it and don’t like it.

That’s true, and normal. The question is, will fear steer us or will God steer us? Isaac listened more carefully to his fear than to his God. His fear led him to sin against God, and temporarily abandon his wife, and put the hospitable Philistines in danger of God’s punishment.

When Abimelek found out they were married, he declared the death penalty for anyone who harmed either Isaac or Rebekah. That is the last line of the story, the bottom line. God’s protection. In spite of all this, God took care of him and Rebekah and the Philistines. Isaac was faithless, but God remained faithful.

Do we think that if God appeared to us in the night, and said “I will be with you and bless you,” that we would live with more faith the next day? Don’t count on it. Isaac doubted God, he lied, he left his wife Rebekah completely unprotected. As Abraham. But God still kept his promise.

3, Blessing and Troubles – 26:12-22

Isaac planted crops that same year and harvested a hundredfold. Whatever he’s seeding, corn or wheat or whatever, for every bushel of seed he planted, he got 100 bushels in the harvest. That was the best it could be in a perfect year, and it says this happened because the Lord blessed him, and remember that this all happened in a time of famine.

Isaac’s flocks and herds also increased, and many servants, and the Philistines envied him, and they got grumpy. To get even with him for being so wealthy and blessed, they filled in his wells. His father Abraham had dug wells there, and the Philistines filled them with earth. Then king Abimelek said, “move away, you are too powerful, we don’t want you around here.”

So Isaac moved, and opened up his father's wells, which the Philistines had filled. And he dug a new well, but the people of that place said, "this is our well." So he dug another well, and the people of that place quarreled about that one too. So he moved from there and dug another well, and then they left him alone. Isaac: "now the Lord has given us room, and we will flourish."

Isaac is not one to stick up for his own rights. He stayed on the move until people left him alone. But God was still with him, and blessing him, and taking care of him, and Isaac sees it. When people finally left him alone, "the Lord has given us room," he said, "and we will flourish."

And he was right. That's how that section ends, and take it to heart. In spite of being pushed around, God gave him room so he could flourish. That's how God takes care his people.

4, God Renews his Promise – 26:23-25

About that time, God appeared to Isaac at night, and renewed his promise to Isaac, to remind Isaac that God had not forgotten. At night the Lord appeared 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 your descendants, for the sake of my servant Abraham."

"Don't be afraid." What's Isaac afraid of? He was afraid to be killed because of Rebekah, but that was taken care of some time ago. We already noticed that Isaac was not one to stick up for his own rights, he's meek, gentle. He would move away if people were difficult.

It seems that he was also timid, afraid of grumpy people. He tends to be meek and timid. God said, "Don't be afraid, I'm with you, I've got your back, you're going to be fine. I will bless you, for the sake of my servant Abraham. Your father was devoted to me, so I'm devoted to you."

People, this is the blessing WE get. Five times in Genesis, God promised, "I will bless all the nations through you." God said that three times to Abraham, once to Isaac, at the beginning of this chapter, and once later to Jacob. "I will bless all the nations through you."

This is the blessing that Christ made available to Gentiles. What blessing do we think that is? If we just had Genesis, what was the blessing that God wanted to bring to all the nations? Just this.

"Don't be afraid, for I am with you, and I will bless you, and make your life fruitful, for the sake of my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will be with you, and watch over you, just as I was with them and watched over them." That is what God has *always* wanted to do to every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve. The NT often repeats this kind of language to all believers.

"Don't be afraid," God says to each of us, "for I am with you, and I will bless you, and make your life fruitful for the sake of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They were devoted to *me*, and I promised *them* that I would do this for *you*, and indeed I *will* do this for *you*!"

In response to this promise renewal from God, Isaac built an altar, and called on the name of the Lord. “Calling on the name of the Lord” can mean calling on God for some kind of help, but not always. Sometimes like here it means to worship, giving God honour for something he’s done.

God was very good to Isaac that night, and in the morning Isaac did not just carry on as usual. God did something unusual for Isaac, so Isaac did something special that day to honour God.

If God gives us a special encouragement, we could do this too, in response. Build an altar, do something with your hands to remember the event. Put a stone in the corner of your yard, make a bookmark for your Bible. Write on it what God did, and the date. Do something with your hands, to celebrate God’s help, and to remember. Don’t just say, “that was special.”

God does not do that every night, and has no intention of doing so. The last time God promised Isaac a blessing like this, he blew it quickly afterward, by lying about Rebekah. This time, Isaac built an altar, and he worshipped and honoured the Lord. Build an altar with your hands, and give God a gift, whatever you have to give.

In Genesis 35, Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place God spoke to him, and he poured out a drink offering on the stone, and some oil. How might your altar and gift look?

5, Philistines want a Treaty – 26:26-33

King Abimelek and a few important officials came to visit Isaac. This time, Isaac was neither meek nor timid. Isaac said to the king, “You hated me, and you told me to go away, so I did. And now you come to visit me? Why? What do you want?”

They were very polite to Isaac. “We see clearly that your God Yahweh is with you. We want a sworn agreement between us, a treaty, so that you won’t harm us, just as we did not harm you, but always treated you well, and sent you away peacefully. Because you are certainly blessed by your God Yahweh.”

Not hard to read between the lines here. They are afraid of Isaac. They can see that he is mild and gentle, not a fighter, and yet his wealth and influence grows and grows. Isaac’s God, whoever that Yahweh is, is taking very good care of him, and if he ever starts to resent the Philistines, they will be destroyed. Make a treaty with us, so you won’t harm us.

The Philistines can see that Yahweh is looking out for Isaac, they can see that he’s blessed by his God, they say that twice. That’s the most important part of this story.

When Isaac found out what they wanted, he made a feast for them, and they all ate and drank together. What a nice thing. He was good to them. The next morning they made solemn promises not to harm each other. Isaac sent them on their way, and they left peacefully. He sent them away more kindly than they sent him away.

Summary

God promised Abraham that he would bless him, and his descendants, Gen 12-15. Genesis 26 tells us about God keeping that promise to Isaac. God moved it all on to Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac and to his wife Rebekah, and it carries on there. In two of these scenes, God made the promises directly to Isaac, and the other stories show how it happened.

We read about Isaac's fear, and his failure. We read about Abimelek's protection of Isaac and Rebekah, and Isaac's great harvest, and all his troubles with his wells, and then being given space to flourish. It was clear to the Philistines that God Almighty was looking out for Isaac.

Let's come back to this four part blessing: "Don't be afraid. I am with you. I will bless you. I will make your life fruitful." This was the standard blessing to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and that whole family. And these are also repeated often in the NT to all followers of Christ.

As far as Genesis is concerned, this is the blessing that God wants to spread to every nation on earth. God says this to everyone of us here, today. He means it just as much today as he meant it that night in Gerar, most of 4000 years ago, when he said it to Isaac. Same God, same blessing. Because of Christ, it comes to us, too.

In response, God wants us to worship him, and live obediently in his ways. But once in a while, if we get a special encouragement from God, we could build an altar, make something with our hands by which to remember God and honour him. We could give him a gift. Make a concrete response of some kind to God himself, to show him you were listening, and treasure his message to you. Amen.

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, thank you for showing yourself to us in these stories. Thank you for how you led and watched over those first families, and how you blessed them. Thank you that when they failed, you were still faithful. Thank you for how determined you are to spread that kind of blessing to all the nations, so that we here find ourselves inside that same care. Thank you that you are always with *us*, and that you have decided to bless *us* and to make *our* lives fruitful, and nothing can stand in your way. Though we still are often afraid, thank you that we don't need to be. Lead us, O God, to respond in faith, and to live in your ways, as Abraham did. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May the Lord save us from living fearfully.

May the Lord be with us.

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

May the Lord make our lives fruitful, as he promised. Amen.

Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.