

THE ORIGINS OF IT ALL!: A STUDY OF GENESIS

XXIX.) PRESERVING THE PROMISE

GENESIS 26:1-33

Q: We've already seen the ups and downs exhibited by Abraham as he lived out his life in God's call. What do you think we should expect and will see then from Isaac?

A.) THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE (vv. 1-6)

1.) In Responding To Difficulty (vv. 1-3a)

- Like his father before him, Isaac faces the difficulties of a famine in the land to which God called them.
- Like his father, Isaac's first reaction was to seek help and solutions from tangible, human means. He went first to Abimelech. Perhaps to seek greater help and favor. Perhaps to tell him they would be leaving to Egypt (like Abraham did).
- But this time, the LORD intervenes first!
- It is significant that when the LORD speaks to Isaac He not only emphasizes that he remain in the land of the Promise, but He specifically refers to Isaac's dwelling there “*as a foreigner.*”

Why?

- It was God's will and plan for him and his people to dwell in this land first and for some time as foreigners as opposed to 'dwellers' or 'citizens.'

What significance does this have for us?

- Consider what we already learned from the negative example of Lot.
- We, too, have a yet-to-be-fully-actualized inheritance upon this earth. But first and during this time, we are but foreigners. We are and should be different, distinct from and stand out amidst the other peoples of this land. We should expect to be treated as invaders or at best tolerated guests rather than as rightful heirs.

2.) In Believing The Promise (v. 3-4)

- The Promise previously given to Abraham is now reiterated to Isaac.
- The Promise of the land is heightened to “*the lands.*” This probably does not refer to any increase in size of the promised land but a great acknowledgment and assurance that the promised territory includes land currently claimed and occupied by various different people groups.
- The Promise also is built upon and includes the steady Presence of the LORD.

3.) In Following His **Will** (v. 5)

- The very basis of the Promise is Abraham's obedience to the LORD's Will in every area.
- All of the specific terms used to emphasize this are legal designations.
- “*voice*” =
- “*Charge*” =
- “*commandments*” =
- “*statutes*” =
- “*laws*” =
- It is implied that the same will and needs to be just as true of Isaac. **Why?**
- Be careful: the emphasis here is not on God's obligations, but the obligations of His vassal! Far too often, we make this mistake concerning the promises of God. We surmise that if we just do $x+y+z$, then God owes us no matter what to do $A+B+C$. In reality, Scripture teaches us differently. To paraphrase, God says: “I will to do $A + B + C$, but in a manner that it becomes actualized through you as you do $x+y+z$.” *The reward is in and part of and doing!*

Q: What's the difference between these approaches?

- *Earning vs. Fulfilling;*
Producing vs. Receiving;
Initiating vs. Following
- **We enjoy God's blessings as we obediently follow His Path!**

B.) THE THREAT OF **FEAR FOR SELF (vv. 7-11)**

- Surely, at least, Isaac wouldn't pull the same “wife-sister” stunt that his father tried twice?
- Ah, yea, he did! He did so carelessly and he got caught.
- In fact, of great significance the word referring to his “playing” with or “caressing” Rebekah is a play on words with his own name AND the same word used in 21:9 to refer to Ishmael's playful mocking of Isaac.
- The implication is that in this instance Isaac is living up to the negative connotation of his name and in doing so making a mockery of the Promise he is to carry and represent.
- Why did he do this? “***Because I thought I might die on account of her.***”
- In other words, Isaac chose something both sinful and foolish because all he could or would see or think about was *his own* fears of what could happen to *him*.

- He never considered how his chosen handling of the situation for his own preservation could be a source not only of pain but of sin for others, including his wife! Not to mention, a great threat to the Promise. He had no trouble recognizing that the possibility of his own death could jeopardize the Promise, but gave no consideration to the fact that his ploy could lead to the violation of his wife by the Philistines which would further result in a great threat to the Promise.
- Selfishness is our greatest natural enemy! What will happen to *me*? How will this affect *me*? God/my family/my church needs *me*!
- Yet, again and again – as is the case here – Scripture teaches us the opposite! Scripture teaches that we are to forsake ourselves, trusting ourselves completely in God's Hands and direct our thoughts instead upon those others around us and the impact of our choices on *them*.
- Notice, in addition, that it took a pagan/barbarian to recognize and call out the sinful choice Isaac made but would not see himself!
- Finally, do not miss either the importance of preserving marriage as necessary to preserving God's Promise for future generations.

C.) FAITHFUL SOWING = **BLESSING & CONFLICT** (vv. 12-14)

- Here we see another parallel with Abraham as Isaac searches and perseveres in the foreign wilderness and ultimately re-establishes Beersheba as the anchor of blessing.
- First, we see that as Isaac responded to the LORD through faithfully sowing His seed in the land the result was a tremendous harvest of blessing. First in one area (agriculture), then another (livestock) and another (human authority).
- The description of his blessing in v. 13 literally reads: “*And the man became great, and he continually became greater, until he became very great*” and then further explains this greatness in detailing his areas of prosperity.
- Don't miss that this is the first mention in Scripture of the idea of “sowing.” Note also that the blessed result of faithful sowing here (100 times) is the same as that in Jesus' parable (**Matthew 13:23**).
- So, Isaac sows faithfully and receives countless blessings in various areas above and beyond his previous expectations. Surely now there can be no doubt that God's special Hand is uniquely upon Him. True. Surely, then, he 'has it made' with 'no worries'? NOT true.
- The Philistines looked upon him with great envy.

Q: Why is this a problem? Shouldn't the world see through us the greatness of blessing available through the True God and desire it for themselves?

- Yes, but as a gift submitted to God's will and grace and NOT as something to be entitled to, earned or taken. Yet, most often that is how it is. Not only with unbelievers, but sadly in other believers toward one another.
- The result is conflict.

D.) DIGGING FOR **BLESSING** (vv. 15-22)

- Ultimately, though, it became less about obtaining the blessings of God for themselves (because that would require too much of them) and instead became all about working hard to deprive others of the blessing.
- So, the Philistines filled up the first well and proceeded to follow and hound Isaac and his tribe.

- Keeping in mind that water is a powerful symbol of God's blessing, let us look again at this series of events. . .

Q: How did Isaac respond to this conflict against God's blessings?

- He could have resisted (by right, law and force), but he chose not to do so.
- Each time, he let them have their way and moved on trusting God to continue with them (as He promised) and bless them wherever His faithful people were.
- It took a few different attempts and moves, but eventually that is exactly what happened!

E.) SETTLING ON GOD'S WORD (vv. 23-25)

- In fact, it happened at the same spot that Abraham had previously made a covenant of peace with the Philistines AND where they had lived after the sacrifice on Mount Moriah.
- According to God's Promise & Blessing then, they established themselves with the LORD and their worship of Him at the center of their society.

F.) SEEKING PEACE (vv. 26-33)

- Now, it is Abimelech who comes and seeks to make peace with Isaac? **Why?**
- Isaac's persistence witness of trusting in the LORD to lead and provide no matter the opposition or change in expectations it forces.
- Through this they saw that they could not deprive God's faithful people of His blessing. Every time they thought they had, God's faithful people simply moved on and found even more blessing!

Ross Concludes:

“The blessings that Isaac received were material, but they were proof of the spiritual heritage he had received from his father. In the New Testament also, believers often enjoy God's blessings. It is their responsibility to live in the expectation of the divine provision for the needs of this life and, when enjoying them, to proclaim the divine presence. If opposition should come, believers can take the lead from the example of Isaac on how to live in peace with all people. If believers were truly confident that God would supply all their needs no matter what hostility they faced from the world, their proclamation of the faith would be far more substantive and convincing” (pg. 469).