

## Comments on Genesis 26

Isaac's history falls into the middle of the Jacob and Esau story, suggesting Isaac's life wasn't prominent enough to deserve its own timeline. The story is a seeming repeat of incidents from Abraham's life, with Isaac behaving similarly. For example, both Abraham and Isaac end up in the situation of being in fear for their lives as a result of having beautiful wives while being in the company of the Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. Both resort to similar tactics, with Isaac being the less honest of the two. We also have a repeat of the obtaining of wells among the Philistines, with negotiations with the Abimelech and advisors. Abraham's obtaining wells in 21:22-34 is significantly less contentious than is Isaac's here.

The story is bracketed by two revelations of the Lord (v. 2-5 and v. 24) to Isaac wherein the Lord appears to him unsolicited. In both instances the promises made to him are presented as dependent upon his father's merits and not upon his own. This is apparently the main point of the chapter, that even though Abraham's son is less zealous than Abraham under similar circumstances, the Lord will still respect the promises made to Abraham and protect them. Naturally, this protection is not unqualified (cf. v. 5, v. 25), but there does seem to be considerable leeway granted. The underlying theology is the covenant with Abraham does not necessarily require an unbroken line of exceptionally righteous people like Abraham to keep it going. Even less-than-zealous sons like Isaac will not interrupt the Lord's covenant.

<sup>1</sup> And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; <sup>4</sup> And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; <sup>5</sup> Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. <sup>6</sup> And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:

v1-6 A famine spreads through the land and the Lord tells Isaac to stay in the land, and not leave for Egypt (v. 2), as Abraham had done many years early (cf. ). Isaac is to stay put and the

Lord will take care of him (v. 3), and will keep all of the promises He made to Abraham concerning the land and the children (v. 4-6).

Note the Lord repeatedly makes "I will..." statements, emphasizing the covenant has already been made with Abraham (v. 5), so the Lord's efforts are ensured. The lack of Isaac's zeal does not affect the promises the Lord made to Abraham.

<sup>7</sup> And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon. <sup>8</sup> And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. <sup>9</sup> And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife; and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. <sup>11</sup> And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

v7-11 Repeating his father Abraham's actions, Isaac lies about Rebekah being his sister, on the assumption the locals would murder him for his wife, because of her beauty (v. 7). After quite some time, the Abimelech sees Isaac being affectionate with Rebekah (v. 8). Abimelech questions Isaac (v. 9) and castigates him for putting them in a bad situation (v. 10). The Abimelech then warns all of the locals away from Rebekah on threat of death (v. 11).

v7 Note it is Isaac who surmises there is a lethal threat, and not the narrator, as was in the case of Abraham. The narrator does not endorse Isaac's assumption, suggesting there never was a real threat. There is nothing in the subsequent verses that suggest anyone pursued Rebekah, and there is no divine intervention mentioned in the text, as was the case with Sarah. This suggests Isaac's concerns were unfounded.

Furthermore, the Abimelech castigates Isaac for being deceptive, because it might have led to sin on his people's part, showing concern for social morality and the ethical well-being of his people. Additionally, the Abimelech assumes that Isaac "sporting" with Rebekah necessarily requires they not be siblings, ruling out the acceptance of incest as a cultural norm. Overall, at this point in time, the Philistines are being

portrayed in the text as being pretty good people. Their worst sin in this chapter is envy over Isaac's seemingly unfounded prosperity, and they don't see to murder him or steal his property. Instead, they fill in his wells and tell him to go away, which is pretty benign.

This is likely intended as a warning against bigotry to Israelite readers. Later in Israelite history the Philistines were an existential threat. At this point in time, no.

v8 The relatively close proximity of Isaac and Rebekah to the Abimelech suggests they were his guests, and were therefore taking advantage of his graciousness while being duplicitous.

<sup>12</sup> Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. <sup>13</sup> And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: <sup>14</sup> For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup> For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. <sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. <sup>17</sup> And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

v12-17 The drought ends, and Isaac and Rebekah move out back onto the land and they prosper by the hand of providence (v. 12), becoming wealthy and powerful (v. 13). He becomes so wealthy the locals are jealous of him (v. 14), so they stop up the wells Abraham had dug (v. 15), to deprive him of water. The Abimelech then tells Isaac to leave, because they don't want trouble (v. 16), so he leaves, but doesn't go all that far (v. 17).

He text clearly indicates it was the Lord's doing that Isaac prospered, and not a result of Isaac's industry or ingenuity.

<sup>18</sup> And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. <sup>19</sup> And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. <sup>20</sup> And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. <sup>21</sup> And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

<sup>22</sup> And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

v18-22 Isaac moves away from the Philistines, but not so far that he doesn't return and excavate his father's wells (v. 18). Isaac's servants find a new well that is fed by a spring (v. 19), which is very valuable. The locals claim the well and the spring, causing contention (v. 20). They abandon that well, and dig another one, which leads to more strife with the locals (v. 21). Isaac moves further away, digs another well, and the locals leave him alone there, so they are relieved (v. 22).

v22 "For now the Lord hath made room for us", some translations phrase this passage as "At last the Lord has made room for us" (NASB), "Now at last [יָחַן](#) has granted us ample space" (JPS) suggesting a reading that Isaac is complaining about how long it took for the Lord to see fit to producing a favorable outcome for Isaac.

<sup>23</sup> And he went up from thence to Beersheba. <sup>24</sup> And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. <sup>25</sup> And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

v23-25 Isaac moves again to the same well Abraham had previously dug and covenanted with the Abimelech at (v. 23, cf. 21:22-34), and when he does, the Lord tells him to not worry because He will bless and protect him because of the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 24). Isaac builds an altar to the Lord there, and digs a well (v. 25), presumably exhuming the previous dug one.

<sup>26</sup> Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. <sup>27</sup> And Isaac said unto them, wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? <sup>28</sup> And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; <sup>29</sup> That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD.

<sup>30</sup> And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.  
<sup>31</sup> And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

<sup>32</sup> And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, we have found water. <sup>33</sup> And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

v26-33 Abimelech travels with his retinue (v. 26) to visit Isaac, similar to what happened earlier with Abraham (cf. 21:22-34). Isaac rebuffs the Abimelech, asking what the purpose of the visit is (v. 27). Abimelech explains himself requesting a mutual non-aggression pact (v. 28-29). Isaac drops his challenge and extends the customary courtesy of feeding and boarding guests (v. 30), suggesting forgiveness over past differences, and they covenant together in the morning (v. 31). Later that same day the servants digging the well return and state they have found water (v. 32). The name Abraham previously gave the area continues to be used by Isaac (v. 33), because of the oath made with Abimelech, and presumably because of the additional oath made previously by the Lord in v. 24.

It is unclear if this is the same Abimelech as who covenants with Abraham. As "Abimelech" is a title of political leadership, this may be a different person.

It is clearly implied in the story the favorable relations among the Philistines and the well still having water are acts of providence.

<sup>34</sup> And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: <sup>35</sup> which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

v34-35 While things are going reasonably well for Isaac as far as socially and materially, things at home are problematic because Esau has married two local women (v. 34), who are nothing but grief (v. 35).

v35 We are told that Esau's wives were a real pain to Isaac and Rebekah. Unfortunately, no details are given so we are left to speculate based on the little we do know. We know Rebekah, despite being from a wealthy family, was perfectly willing and

eager to work hard and participate in the daily chores of the day. We can safely surmise that at the very least they did not share this in common with her, as if they did then it doesn't seem likely that Rebekah would be unfavorably disposed towards them. The other assumption we can take simply from their background is they probably brought some of their cultural and religious practices with them.

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