

Genesis 25-26 • In the Footsteps of Isaac

Introduction

Since Isaac was the son of a famous father (Abraham) and the father of a famous son (Jacob), we sometimes seem to “lose” Isaac in the overall picture. Although he lived longer than any of the other patriarchs, his life seems less exciting and often treated as just a transition between the larger-than-life personalities of Abraham and Jacob. But what he did go through serves as an extremely relevant example to all believers today. What are we to do when inheriting a great spiritual heritage? How are we to pass this along to the next generation? But perhaps even more importantly Isaac serves as an example of a believer struggling in all the same ways we find ourselves struggling.

¹Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. ³Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. ⁴The sons of Midian were Ephah and Epher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah. ⁵Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; ⁶but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east.

⁷These are all the years of Abraham’s life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. ⁹Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, ¹⁰the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. ¹¹It came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.

¹²Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s maid, bore to Abraham; ¹³and these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam ¹⁴and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, ¹⁵Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. ¹⁶These are the sons of Ishmael and these

[Read 25:1-11]

Q: Although Abraham married again and produced another six sons and at least 10 grandsons and great-grandsons, why is it that none of them have the status given to Isaac?

A: Isaac is the heir of all things, an allusion to another characteristic in which he typifies Christ.

in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Hebrews 1:2

Q: How does Abraham’s death reveal what faith can do for someone?

1. He died in peace. (Gen. 15:15)
2. He died “full” or satisfied.
3. He died in faith.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Hebrews 11:13

Q: What kind of legacy did Abraham leave Isaac?

1. He left Isaac a personal, godly example (Gen. 18:19). In other words, how to live spiritually.
2. He left Isaac the tent and altar. (Gen. 26:25) In other words, how to live physically.
3. He left Isaac the promises of God. (Gen. 26:2-5) In other words, how to live according to faith.

Point: As a father Isaac inherited a distinguished home where spiritual blessings meant far more than material wealth.

[Read 25:12-23]

Q: What is revealed here about Ishmael’s character?

A: He was determined to live not according to the example of his father Abraham but according to his own will and desire as indicated in v.18 that “he settled in defiance of all his relatives”.

Point: And so the historic struggle between the cousin nations of the Middle East begins. It’s worth noting that one of the deceptions of the Quran is to reverse the places of Isaac and Ishmael, claiming Ishmael was the son of promise Abraham was about to sacrifice instead of Isaac. In so doing they maintain the lie that they’re entitled to everything in place of Israel.

are their names, by their villages, and by their camps; twelve princes according to their tribes. ¹⁷These are the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. ¹⁸They settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; he settled in defiance of all his relatives.

¹⁹Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. ²¹Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb;
And two peoples will be separated
from your body;
And one people shall be stronger than
the other;
And the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

²⁸Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; ³⁰and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red

Q: Why might it be significant that Scripture mentions Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born?

A: Because it mentions in v.20 that Isaac and Rebekah were married when he was 40, that means they lived the first 20 years of their married life knowing God's covenant promise without bearing any children. They appear to have undergone their own test of faith in this matter just as Abram and Sarai did before them.

Q: What would people living at that time have found very odd about God's revelation about the twins about to be born?

A: It went directly contrary to the established custom by declaring "the older shall serve the younger". The first and oldest was always considered the rightful heir of the father.

Q: What is the greater message contained in God's response?

A: They had waited 20 years before seeing God's promise fulfilled by Rebekah's pregnancy. That promise to both Abraham and Isaac wasn't just for children, but that their children would become entire nations of countless people. By designating "two nations are in your womb", God is also saying, "I'm fulfilling everything just like I said I would."

Q: What greater theological process is at work in God's elevation of Jacob over Esau?

A: It's clear evidence of God's election. (See Rom. 9) God's choice was not based on either of their deeds for they were unborn and had not done anything yet. It's an example of God's plan and calling for our life which goes back to even before we are born.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Point: In many respects one might say Isaac's was a "disappointed" home in that things weren't going to unfold in the way many of its members desired. Isaac's heritage did not excuse him from being tested and ruled by God as an individual according to God's desire.

[Read 25:24-34]

Q: What are some of the characteristics of Esau which will also represent the character of those descended from him?

1. Esau is named for his appearance. ("Esau" literally means "hairy".) Later he will be nicknamed for his actions. ("Edom" means "red".)
2. Esau is a man of the world, full of vigor and adventure.
3. Having little appreciation for spiritual things, Esau would rather feed his body than enjoy the promises of God.
4. Esau despised his spiritual privileges as the firstborn.
5. Esau chose the flesh instead of the Spirit. He is described in Heb. 12:16 as "immoral" and "godless": "that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal."
6. We never read of Esau having either a tent or an altar. In other words, he appears to reject the legacy of both Isaac and Abraham.
7. At the end of Gen. 26 we see that Esau loved worldly women.
8. Esau was a worldly success and a spiritual failure.

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stuff there, for I am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

³¹But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”

³²Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?”

³³And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

¹Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ²The LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. ³Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”

⁶So Isaac lived in Gerar.

⁷When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “my wife,” thinking, “the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.”

⁸It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. ⁹Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

And Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘I might die on account of her.’”

¹⁰Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you

9. Others?

Q: What are some of the characteristics of Jacob which also represent the character of those descended from him?

1. Jacob is named for his action’s. (“Jacob” means “heel-gripper.”) This name characterizes him as a supplanter, schemer, deceiver.
2. Jacob preferred to stay at home.
3. Jacob’s scheming shows his doubt that God would fulfill His promise on God’s terms and instead seeks to fulfill them on his own.
4. Jacob will eventually wrestle with God and come to terms with Him. (Gen. 32)
5. Jacob will eventually embrace the character and heritage of Isaac and Abraham.
6. Others?

Point: *Ultimately Isaac’s was a divided home not just because of the difference between the two brothers, but the differences between Isaac and Rebekah themselves in how they saw their children.*

[Read 26:1-6]

Q: What does Isaac begin to do which always turns out to be a big mistake?

A: He starts toward Egypt.

Point: *Going down to Egypt is an Old Testament way of expressing when someone backslides into their old life.*

Q: So where does Isaac go instead? What might this indicate about him?

A: Isaac listens to the Lord and does not go all the way to Egypt but instead settles in Gerar, a city which is on the borderline with Egypt.

Point: *At this point Isaac might typify the many “borderline” Christians we see today.*

Point: *Like Abraham his father before him, Isaac faced the same temptations. Every generation will be tested individually but they’re still responsible for learning the right less from the previous generation and passing along the right example to the next.*

[Read 26:7-11]

Q: Why does this all sound so familiar?

A: It’s the same thing Abraham did not just in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20) but a second time in this very same place of Gerar. (Gen. 20:1-5)

Observation: *“Abimelech” is not actually a proper name but the title of whoever was king at the time. So it’s not the same person before which both Abraham and Isaac appeared, but whoever was the reigning king at the time who held that title.*

Q: So what do you suppose this all means?

A: At the very least it means that Isaac repeated his father’s sin. This would result in the same bad outcomes as Abraham before him, the loss of credibility, loss of testimony, and drawing a public rebuke from a heathen king.

Point: *People living “on the border” or in the wrong place entirely to begin with often come to live out of fear instead of by faith.*

would have brought guilt upon us.”¹¹ So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, “He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

¹²Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him,¹³ and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy;¹⁴ for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.

¹⁵Now all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth.¹⁶ Then Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.”¹⁷ And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there.

¹⁸Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them.¹⁹ But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water,²⁰ the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, “The water is ours!” So he named the well Esek, because they contended with him.

²¹Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah.²² He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, “At last the Lord has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land.”

²³Then he went up from there to Beersheba.²⁴ The LORD appeared to him the same night and said,

“I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham.”

²⁵So 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.

²⁶Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army.

²⁷Isaac said to them, “Why have you

[Read 26:12-22]

Q: What do the names of these wells mean?

1. “Esek” (v.20) means “contention”.
2. “Sitnah” (v.21) means “enmity” or “strife”.
3. “Rehoboth” (v.22) means “wide places”.

Q: What well-known event in Jesus’ life takes place at Isaac’s wells?

A: This is where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4:1-14)

Q: So because of Jesus’ discussion with the woman about the Living Water, what do we know to be the greater spiritual teaching behind these wells of water?

A: They’re symbolic of the divine resources of God for our spiritual life.

Q: How might we relate our present condition to Isaac’s problem of his enemies stealing or stopping up his father’s wells?

A: It could also be seen from a spiritual point of view that the spiritual wells of our father have been taken captive by the world and we need to get them back in the forms of prayer, the Bible, the family altar, the church, etc. It’s a picture of spiritual warfare.

Point: Isaac not only re-opened them but again called them by the same names Abraham used. (v.18) before he proceeded to dig new wells to meet his present day’s needs. We have to go back all the way to the beginning and re-establish the basics before building something anew.

[Read 26:23-35]

Q: So what does “Beersheba” mean?

A: It means “the well of the oath”.

Q: What is significant about Beersheba geographically in relation to Gerar from which he’s leaving?

A: Gerar was on the borderline with Egypt in the land of the Philistines; Beersheba is located in Canaan proper. In other words, Isaac went as far towards Egypt as he could without actually going there and experienced trials and hardship until he returned to the land of promise from which he was never supposed to leave in the first place.

Point: As Isaac moved towards Egypt and away from Canaan, a symbol of God’s Word and promises, Isaac experienced conflict; but when he returned to God’s Word and ways in the character of his father Abraham as symbolized by Beersheba, God met him and gave him peace. Perhaps even more importantly, his credibility and testimony to those around him was restored.

come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?"

²⁸They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹that 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.'" ³⁰Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

³¹In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. ³²Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac's servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water."³³So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

³⁴When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

Overall Application

- *In what ways are you similar or different to Isaac?*
- *How do different phases of his walk relate to different times in your own walk?*
- *What are the greater lessons learned to apply not just to your personal return to Christ, but in seeking the return of His whole church?*