

## From Famine to Feast” (Genesis 26:1-33)

My children and I enjoy playing baseball. [Bring baseball equipment on stage.] My eight-year-old son, Joshua, particularly enjoys the game. We play nearly every day. During our practice sessions I have been trying to teach Joshua certain baseball skills. When he swings the bat I tell him not to “chop wood” (i.e., hack at the ball). Instead, I coach him to have a level and fluid swing. I do this by asking him to imagine there is a crystal vase on the dining room table, and he has my permission to swing right through it. Whether Joshua is batting or fielding, I always urge him to “keep his eye on the ball.” I have repeated this so many times that my four-year-old, Jena, likes to say, “If there’s one thing I know, it’s to keep my eye on the ball.”

Unfortunately, I do not always follow my own baseball advice. On at least one occasion when Joshua was pitching to me, I took my eye off the ball and fouled a pitch back over my head into our neighbor’s yard. Of course, I then had to lift Joshua over the fence into their yard to quickly retrieve the ball before their two salivating dogs could charge him. There are also the infamous episodes when I take my eye off the ball and it goes through my legs. I hate that! Whenever these blunders happen, Joshua regurgitates my own counsel and gives me a hard time. What can I do in response? I just have to smile, look sheepish, and try to do a better job following my own instruction.

My failure to perfectly execute on the baseball diamond does not trouble me too much. In the years I have been playing baseball with my kids, I have never lost sleep over my mishaps. My kids can overcome my baseball blunders. However, if I fail to practice what I preach when I am competing in the game of life, the consequences for my kids and me are staggering. This is also true for you if you are a parent or grandparent. Your children and grandchildren are observing your life, so don’t compromise...remain faithful. You may not have children or grandchildren; nevertheless, you have influence over someone. Be sure you are setting an example worth following.

In Genesis 26, we are going to consider how the life of a father affects his son. This is the only chapter of Genesis devoted exclusively to Isaac. While he is mentioned in other chapters he is not the focus of attention. Here Isaac’s life is summed up in the events described, all of which have a striking parallel in the life of his father, Abraham.<sup>1</sup> These similarities are the key to rightly understanding and applying this passage to our own lives. This section could be titled, “Like Father, Like Son.” As we will see, children tend to inherit much of the behavior of their parents.

Our story begins with this disastrous announcement: “**Now there was a famine<sup>2</sup> in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham<sup>3</sup>** (26:1a). This was a serious problem for Isaac. He was in danger of losing everything he had. And this famine happened in the “Promised Land,” the land God promised Abraham’s descendants. Even though Isaac’s life was singled out by God for blessing, and even though he’s in the center of God’s will, he has to deal with a famine. What a reminder that we can be in the “Promised Land,” the place of blessing, and still experience hardship.

Unfortunately, many Christians don’t really believe this. We tend to think that God blesses people by giving them pleasant circumstances—that God’s blessing can be discerned by watching which people have it good and which people have it bad. Sometimes, when adversity comes to us who believe, we get discouraged because we think God has abandoned us. We expect the faith we have in God to somehow deliver us from hardship. But that’s not always how it works. You and I can be right where God wants us to be and still suffer hardships. That’s how life works. Trials are the normal experience of God’s people. God’s will isn’t always the easy and prosperous path. Often, it is gut wrenching.

Due to the famine, **“Isaac went to Gerar,<sup>4</sup> to Abimelech king of the Philistines”** (26:1b). In an attempt to preserve his wealth, in the form of many cattle, Isaac went to the land of the Philistines. While in Gerar or perhaps even before, Isaac decided to go down to Egypt just as his father had done (cf. 12:10-20). This seems like the logical thing to do since Egypt is where all the food is. Now Isaac is not wrong for being concerned about the famine or feeding his family, but since we have no indication that God led this decision he was wrong for failing to trust God to provide for his needs (see Isa 31:1). And so the Lord appeared to Isaac with this corrective word of instruction: **“Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you.<sup>5</sup> Sojourn 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. I 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;<sup>6</sup> because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”<sup>7</sup>** (26:2-5). God tells Isaac not to go down to Egypt. Instead, he is to remain in Gerar (26:2). Humanly speaking, to stay in Gerar in time of famine was to court catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> Even so, God promises Isaac, **“I will be with you and bless you”** (26:3, 24, 28). When God is present we have nothing to fear (see Isa 41:10). God commands Isaac not to go down to Egypt, but to stay in Gerar to teach Isaac and you and me that His presence will always be with us, and He can bless us no matter what the situation. God can bless us in a bad economy, a bad marriage, a difficult ministry, a challenging workplace, and on and on.

Are you in a bad situation right now? Is your spouse threatening to leave? Are your children so disobedient that you could be a contestant on *Super Nanny*? Does your boss remind you of Attila the Hun? If so, your tendency will be to attempt to escape your situation. Yet, in most situations, that is not God’s will for your life. He wants to provide for you *in the midst* of your impossible circumstances. He wants you to trust Him in the midst of your suffering. The Scriptures teach us again and again that the safest place in the world is in God’s will, for God will never lead us where His grace can’t provide for us. It has been said, “Unbelief asks, ‘How can I get out of this?’ while faith asks, ‘What can I get out of this?’”<sup>9</sup> Today, in the midst of your challenging circumstance, will you ask God to grant you perseverance? Will you look for His presence and blessing? He’s big enough to handle your trial, and He will meet you right in the midst of it.

In these verses, God formally tells Isaac that the blessings of his father, Abraham, will pass to him and his sons (Ps 105:8-11). Why? Two reasons: *First, God is a faithful God who gave Abraham an unconditional covenant of grace. Second, Abraham passed down a legacy of obedience.* As 26:5 tells us, Abraham did indeed fulfill the law. How did he accomplish that without the law having been written? He lived by faith! The person of faith does not live by the law but keeps the law through faith.<sup>10</sup> The word **“because”** (26:5) seems to suggest that Abraham received the covenant as a result of works,<sup>11</sup> yet nothing could be further from the truth! Granted, for Abraham and Isaac to enjoy the practical benefits of the covenant obedience was imperative, but the covenant will be upheld despite their unfaithfulness.<sup>12</sup> The point being made here is Isaac became the spiritual beneficiary of a godly parent, but he had the opportunity to increase God’s blessing on him through his own obedience to God. This is true for us today. Like the Abrahamic covenant, salvation is a free gift from God (Rom 5:15-17). However, for us to enjoy the earthly benefits of our salvation we must obey God (John 14:15; 15:10). But don’t try to grit your teeth, clench your fists, and obey. Simply live by faith and fall in love with Jesus, and obedience will take care of itself. That is the life of faith. Are you seeking to walk in faith? If you walk in faith you’ll fulfill God’s will for your life. Remember, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham all lived before the law, yet they are men who were exemplary in faith. Moses lived in the midst of the law and he failed to persevere. God wants us to walk by faith.

This section ends with a note of Isaac's obedience: **"So Isaac lived in Gerar"** (26:6).<sup>13</sup> After his visitation from God, Isaac responded with obedience. He obeyed God even though it didn't make much sense in the natural. He trusted that God would provide for him in the supernatural.

You would think that, after the Lord appeared to Isaac, he would not be ruled by fear but that was not to be. Isaac, so human and so frail, mingled fear with his faith.<sup>14</sup> In 25:7, Moses pens the following: **"When 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.'"** Amazing! Like Sarah, even at age 60, Rebekah is such a beautiful woman that just being seen with her was a life-threatening experience. Out of concern for his own safety Isaac caves in to the temptation to pass off his wife as his sister, and as a result, willfully puts Rebekah's purity and safety at risk. Like his father, Isaac chose to fear man rather than God (Prov 29:25; 27:1-3).<sup>15</sup>

It's a common pattern for children to repeat their parents' mistakes. Children of abusers have a stronger tendency to become abusers themselves. Children of alcohol and drug addicts have a stronger tendency to become addicts themselves. Children of greedy people or dishonest people tend to fall into the same traps that their parents did. That's just how it goes. It's sobering to realize that our sin doesn't just affect us; it affects others. If you are a parent, how you live serves better to teach your kids than almost anything else. Someone has said, "Young people never do an adequate job of obeying their elders, but they never fail to emulate them." That's the real issue here: imitation.<sup>16</sup>

Now chronologically, Genesis 26 precedes Genesis 25:21-34.<sup>17</sup> If Isaac and Rebekah had Jacob and Esau by this point, the fact that they were husband and wife would have been obvious. Here, the promised seed is with Isaac and Rebekah, but no child has yet been born. Instead of trusting that God will keep him alive to produce descendants, he reasons that he might be killed. Instead of protecting the seed, he endangers it by making Rebekah available to the Philistines.<sup>18</sup> Fortunately, unlike the case with Sarah, Rebekah is never taken into anyone's harem. God makes sure this doesn't happen.

But something does indeed happen in 26:8: **"It 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."** King Abimelech<sup>19</sup> is looking out his window one day and spies Isaac **"caressing"** Rebekah. The *KJV* quaintly translates it, "sporting with his wife Rebekah." There's a humorous wordplay in the Hebrew. The word translated **"caressing"** or "sporting" comes from the same root word translated "Isaac," which means, "he laughs." (Lit. "He who laughs was laughing with Rebekah, his wife.") Here it clearly has a sexual connotation. Whatever this "sport" was, it's obvious that you don't play it with your sister. Apparently, Isaac was a real pro at the sport—in fact, the sport was named after him! This wordplay is significant. There is an implication that his lapse of faith in deceiving the men of Gerar made a mockery of the great promise embodied in his name.<sup>20</sup>

**"Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, 'Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?"** (26:9) Surely, his first thought was, "Oh, gross!" But then he realizes that this was not Isaac's sister. Isaac was caught in a lie. His reputation was stained, and his character was called into question. But we must acknowledge that sometimes God is merciful to us in allowing our sin to be exposed. Whether it is anger, alcohol, pornography, or adultery... sometimes being caught is the best thing that could happen to us. It affords us the opportunity to confess our sin and be restored to the Lord and those that we have sinned against. If you are in sin today, will you take the opportunity to confess your sin to God? Will you then confess your sin to those that you have sinned against? And then "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Rom 12:18)?"

In 26:10-11, the dialogue continues: **“And Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said, ‘I might die on account of her.’ [Do you see how utterly puny this sounds?] 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.’ So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, ‘He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.’”** There are three possible motives for Abimelech’s anger. First, he regarded marital purity of greater importance than Isaac. This is unlikely. Second, he was afraid of God’s judgment. Undoubtedly, he knew how Abraham’s lie had led to God’s judgment against his people some 100 years earlier. Third, he was holding Isaac to a higher standard because of Isaac’s claim to a special relationship with God.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that the later view is correct.

At this point, Isaac should have immediately repented of his sin. But there is no evidence in the text that he did. And, by treating the Philistines in this way, he became a source of stumbling for the people of Gerar, instead of fulfilling his call to be a blessing of God to the nations (12:2-3).

It is right for unbelievers to look at our lives more carefully and with greater scrutiny. Jesus calls believers “the light of the world” and He commands, “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:14-16). Whether we like it or not, we’re called to be models. Therefore, when you sin, you may be sure that an unbeliever is watching through some window. And the unbelieving see and never forget!<sup>22</sup>

James says, “We all stumble in many ways” (Jas 3:2). The question is: What should you do if you fail?

1. Admit your sin. Don’t justify or excuse your behavior. Instead, take full responsibility for what you have done (1 John 1:6-9).
2. Confess your sin to God and to the offended party (Prov 28:13).
3. Ask for forgiveness without justification (Matt 5:23-24).
4. Make restitution for what you’ve done (Matt 18:21-35).
5. Humble yourself and ask for prayer for strength to not re-offend (1 Pet 5:5-6).

After this ethical failure, we read these astounding words in 26:12-17: **“Now Isaac sowed in that land [the land of famine] and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. [This is a miracle!] And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. [Ps 112:10] Now 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. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, ‘Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.’ And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there.”**<sup>23</sup> These verses tell of God’s faithfulness in blessing Isaac as He had promised (cf. 26:3; 24:1; 25:11).<sup>24</sup> In this context the blessings are material, but this is not guaranteed to you and me. God may bless His people materially, but more often than not the blessings are spiritual (see Eph 1:3-14). Later in the Old Testament, the prophets deal with the problem of why the righteous at times suffer and face poverty and famine.<sup>25</sup> Today, God’s blessing is seen in His constant presence.

Maybe you’re wondering, “Why did God bless Isaac immediately after Isaac disobeyed God?” There are three answers.

- *First, God’s grace is greater than our sin* (Ps 103:10). This display shows us that God’s covenant promises are based on grace, not on works. God wants us to obey Him, and He blesses those who obey. But at the same time, He wants us to remember that His sovereign purposes do not depend on our obedience, but rather on His sovereign grace.

- *Second, note that while God blessed Isaac materially, the very blessing was also a source of chastening, because it made the Philistines envy Isaac and stop up his wells (26:14-15). This chastening served to move Isaac back toward Beersheba, where God wanted him.*<sup>26</sup>
- *Finally, God cuts to the root sin. Deception is sin, and God hates the lying tongue (Prov 6:17). But lying here is a symptomatic sin and not the root sin. God did not smash the red warning light (deception), because He was concerned about getting to the root of the problem. The root sin was unbelief or lack of faith. In each case of deception, Abraham and Isaac lied out of fear (cf. 12:11-13; 20:11; 26:7). This fear was the product of an inadequate concept of God. They did not grasp the sovereignty or the omnipotence of God in such a way as to believe that God could protect them, under any and every circumstance. Having solved the problem of too little faith, the sin of deception will not be an issue any longer. It is my personal opinion that we sometimes become preoccupied with “symptom sins,” rushing about trying, as someone in our church has said, to stomp them like roaches. While sin should always be taken seriously, many of our sins will be dealt with by an adequate conception of who God really is. The fundamental sin is that of unbelief, not only for those who are unsaved but also for those who are saved.*<sup>27</sup>

In 26:18-22, Moses writes, **“Then 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. But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, ‘The water is ours!’ So he named the well Esek,<sup>28</sup> because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah.<sup>29</sup> He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth,<sup>30</sup> for he said, ‘At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land.’”** Again, God blesses Isaac. Water in the wilderness is a strong symbol of God’s supernatural blessing, in spite of nature. However, even in the midst of blessing there can be great conflict. The Philistines repeatedly quarreled over Isaac’s wells. Yet, even in the midst of quarreling God was blessing Isaac.

In 26:23-25, Moses hits the key lines of our story: **“Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 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<sup>31</sup> Abraham.’ 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.”<sup>32</sup>** In Beersheba, God appeared to Isaac (his second revelation) calming his fears and reviewing the promises He had given previously (26:2-5). Isaac’s response was to build an altar, worship the Lord,<sup>33</sup> and settle down there.<sup>34</sup> Up to this time, Isaac’s decision as to where he should stay was based upon the finding of abundant water and the absence of hostilities. But now, having dug a well that was uncontested, we would have expected Isaac to dwell there. Instead, we are told that he moved on to Beersheba (26:23).

I believe that a significant change has occurred in Isaac’s thinking. Circumstances had previously shaped most of his decisions, but now something deeper and nobler seems to be giving direction in his life. If you recall, Abraham “planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God” (21:33). It was also the place where Abraham had gone with Isaac, after they came down from the “sacrifice” on Mount Moriah (22:19). It was a place of worship, a place of God’s presence and blessing. Isaac knew that God had promised to give him the land promised to his father, Abraham (26:3-5).

Isaac finally came to see that, through all the opposition over the wells he had dug, God had been guiding him back to the land of promise, back to those places where Abraham had walked in fellowship with God. I believe Isaac went up to Beersheba because he sensed, on a spiritual level, that this was where God wanted him to be. If God had previously been “driving” Isaac through opposition, now Isaac was willing to be led.<sup>35</sup>

Often, God allows adversity of one kind or another to move us physically to where He wants us to be (Acts 17:10), or to move us spiritually to “be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas 1:4). In this case, God used conflict to deepen Isaac’s confidence and dependence upon Him. Isaac’s actions express his trust in the Lord. Isaac was growing in faith. Can you say this? Are you growing in your relationship with God? Are you asking God, “What are you saying to me through this conflict?”

Our story closes with good news in 26:26-33: **“Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army. Isaac said to them, ‘Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?’ They said, ‘We see plainly that the LORD has been with you;’<sup>36</sup> so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 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. You are now the blessed of the LORD.’ Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. Now 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.’ So he called it Shibah [“oath” or “seven”]; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.”** Abimelech again testified to God’s blessing of Isaac and gave God glory (26:28-29). God’s people must maintain confident trust in God’s promise of His presence and provision, in spite of the envy and hostility of unbelievers that His blessing sometimes provokes.<sup>37</sup> God can bless us despite opposition.

As a parent or grandparent, as a Christian man or woman, do you believe that God wants to bless you with His presence? He does! And He will often bless in spite of your disobedience. But He does ask that you and I provide an example worth following. Wouldn’t it be great if the cliché, “like father, like son” had positive connotations? It can—as you learn to walk by faith and follow the Lord despite your fears. My prayer for you is that you will live “like the Father and like the Son.”

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sailhamer comments: “It’s interesting to note that the Bible tells us a lot about Isaac’s father Abraham, and a lot about Isaac’s son Jacob, but we don’t get a lot about Isaac himself. This is the one chapter that really gives his story. It’s an interesting story, in some ways a disconcerting story. It has some surprising things to teach us about God’s blessings. In the short span of one chapter, Moses shows how the whole of the life of Isaac was a rehearsal of that which happened to Abraham. Thus the lesson that is conveyed is that God’s faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What He has done for the fathers, He will also do for the sons.” John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Electronic ed.

<sup>2</sup> Thirteen famines are mentioned in the Bible, the first being that of Genesis 12:10. It is possible that some of them, including this one, were attempts of Satan to destroy the seed of the woman and avert the doom of the serpent.

<sup>3</sup> In Genesis 26, “Abraham” is mentioned eight times and the word “father” six times.

<sup>4</sup> “Gerar” is the same place that Abraham and Sarah went after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 20:1).

<sup>5</sup> Waltke writes, “The Lord’s command and promise and Isaac’s obedience are stylistically and substantively linked with those of Abraham’s encounter (see Gen 12:1-4).” Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 368.

<sup>6</sup> God used the same covenant language with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:6-8, 16; 22:17-18).

<sup>7</sup> The “charge” was the office of patriarch and leader of God’s people. The “commandment” was not the Law of Moses, but the Word of the Lord to leave Ur and to separate from family and land. The “statutes” was the rite of circumcision, and the “laws” meant the practice of righteousness inherent in the walk of grace (cf. Deut 11:1).

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 341.

<sup>9</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Authentic: Genesis 25-50* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1997), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC, Electronic Ed.; Waltke, *Genesis*, 368.

<sup>11</sup> There are five key passages cited as demonstrating that Abraham performed the requirements of God and in return God offered him the everlasting covenant as a gift for his obedience (Gen 12:1; 17:1, 9-14; 22:16; and 26:3-5). While these passages present a tension, it is clear that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in nature. Kaiser writes, “The difficulty of this argument for conditionality and earning the promise is the stress the text makes on God’s actively conferring this covenant on Abraham. In one of the most dramatic scenes in the patriarch’s life, Genesis 15:12–21 depicts Abraham as being only a passive party to the formalization of the covenant, while the Lord, appearing as a ‘smoking firepot with a blazing torch,’ passes between the pieces of the animals in the act of making a covenant with Abraham. It is well worth noting that only God passed between the pieces and therefore obligated himself. Had this been a bilateral covenant in which the covenant depended equally on both parties fulfilling their sides of the bargain, then both God and Abraham would have had to move between the pieces of the animals divided in half and thus say in effect, ‘May it happen to me what has happened to these animals if I do not uphold my side of the covenant’ (Gen 15:18).” See Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997 [1996]), Electronic ed.

<sup>12</sup> The most remarkable text expressing the unconditional nature of the promise is Leviticus 26:44-45: “Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.”

<sup>13</sup> Sailhamer provides these helpful remarks: “It is at first surprising that Isaac remained with Abimelech (v. 6). Was this not also outside of ‘the land’ promised to Abraham? Apparently in anticipation of this problem, the writer notes that the gift of the land included also the land of the Philistines. He does this by showing that the Lord’s promise was to give ‘all these lands’ (*kol-ha’arasot ha’el* v. 4) to Abraham’s descendants, not just ‘in the land’ (*ha’ares*) where there was famine. The use of the plural expands the notion of the land to include all those places where the patriarchs sojourned. The picture of the Promised Land in this narrative is consistent with that of 15:18-19, where the border of ‘the land’ is the ‘river of Egypt’ and the Euphrates.” Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC, Electronic Ed.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 342.

<sup>15</sup> The following points demonstrate the similarities between the sin of Abraham and Isaac.

- Both failed to trust in God during a famine.
- Both sought relief in Gerar, the land of the Philistines.
- Both had beautiful wives.
- Both feared for their safety.

- Both lied by saying that their wife was their sister.
- Both put their wives, others, and the covenant of God at great risk.
- Both sinned against Abimelech.
- Both were rebuked by the ruler of the Philistines.
- Both failed to recognize the gravity of their sin or repent of it.
- Both entered into a treaty agreement with the Philistines.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Brouwer, “Repeating Our Parents’ Mistakes: Putting the Fun Back into Dysfunction” (Genesis 26:1-33): [http://www.bridgewood.org/index.cfm?PAGE\\_ID=373&EXPAND=371](http://www.bridgewood.org/index.cfm?PAGE_ID=373&EXPAND=371)

<sup>17</sup> For another example of this, see Genesis 10-11 (Table of Nations and Tower of Babel).

<sup>18</sup> It appears that Isaac trusts God for the land but not for the descendants.

<sup>19</sup> He was probably the son, or even the grandson, of the Abimelech who ruled over Gerar in Abraham’s time (20:2). It was not unusual in those days for kings to adopt the names of their predecessors, whether recent or remote—a practice that has continued right down to the present. Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 212. Constable writes, “A period of between 70 and 97 years had elapsed between Abraham’s sojourn in Gerar and Isaac’s. Abimelech could have been the same man in both cases since life spans of 150 years were not uncommon at this time. Abimelech demonstrated pious conduct in both cases. In the first, however, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but in the second he wanted to protect Rebekah from his people. Abimelech is a title rather than a personal name and means “royal father.” Thus this may have been another ruler than the one Abraham dealt with.” Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2005), 188.

<sup>20</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988 [2002 ed.]), 460.

<sup>21</sup> Someone has said that the corruption of the best is the worst, and when a believer’s sins have to be pointed out to him by the world, that is, indeed, the sounding of the depths of sadness and sorrow.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 343.

<sup>23</sup> The parallel between Isaac’s life and that of his father is again evident in this account of the disputes over the wells and Isaac’s response. Due to their prosperity Abraham and Isaac needed much room for their flocks and a source of water. Prosperity brought contention between Lot’s herdsmen and those of Abraham (Gen 13:5ff.) just as it did between Isaac’s herdsmen and the herdsmen of Gerar. Isaac, like his father, chose to keep the peace by giving preference to the other party.

<sup>24</sup> In Genesis 31, God blesses Jacob in a similar fashion.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 466.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas writes, “Isaac was publicly blessed even though he had been privately unfaithful. God sometimes shields His children from outside harm even when He has to deal with them severely in private (Num 14:22; 23:21).” W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985), 53.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, *Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs*. Lesson 27: Isaac Walks in His Father’s Steps: Genesis 26:1-35 ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), 1997).

<sup>28</sup> The name *Esek* means “argument” in Hebrew. The following causal clause explains that Isaac gave the well this name as a reminder of the conflict its discovery had created. In the Hebrew text there is a wordplay, for the name is derived from the verb translated “argued.” See NET Bible Notes.

<sup>29</sup> The name *Sitnah* is derived from a Hebrew verbal root meaning “to oppose; to be an adversary.” The name was a reminder that the digging of this well caused “opposition” from the Philistines. See NET Bible Notes.

<sup>30</sup> The name *Rehoboth* is derived from a verbal root meaning “to make room.” The name was a reminder that God had made room for them. The story shows Isaac’s patience with the opposition; it also shows how God’s blessing outdistanced the men of Gerar. They could not stop it or seize it any longer. See NET Bible Notes.

<sup>31</sup> The title “servant of the Lord” is a very high accolade, reserved for such as Moses (Deut 34:5), Joshua (Josh 24:9), Caleb (Num 14:24), David (2 Sam 7:8), and the anonymous Suffering Servant (Isa 42:1; 49:3; 50:10; 52:13). Waltke, *Genesis*, 371.

<sup>32</sup> Isaac’s response was immediate, and thorough, and the results were evident. The altar meant consecration. The prayer expressed need. The tent suggested home. The well indicated provision. And then the testimony came from outside. Those who were formerly hostile became friends. Thomas, *The Pentateuch*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> To “call upon the name of the Lord” meant to extol His character and His works.

<sup>34</sup> Settlers could only continue to live in an area where there was a well. Wells were vital to the life of nomadic herdsmen. While there was probably at least one well at Beersheba already, Isaac dug another for his own use, or

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perhaps because he needed more water. His ability to dig wells indicates both his wealth and his intention to establish permanent residence in the land. These verses seem to confirm the fact that Isaac's decision to move out of Philistine territory pleased God.

<sup>35</sup> Deffinbaugh, *Isaac Walks in His Father's Steps*.

<sup>36</sup> The Queen of Sheba will make a similar statement to Solomon (see 1 Kgs 10:9).

<sup>37</sup> Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 190.