

## Midweek Meditation, November 4, 2020 for the week of November 1

### Genesis 26

You may remember last week, we talked about the birth and the youth years of Jacob and Esau. The important thing to remember about that lesson is the message that God had for Rebekah, that the older of her twins would serve the younger. We discussed how this was God's way of telling Rebekah that Jacob was the heir to God's promise, even though he was not the first born to Isaac. This point was made clear when God said to Rebekah that there were two nations of people in her womb, and the two nations will be separated. That means only one of the boys would be heir to God's promise; to be the leader of God's chosen people, and the leader of the nation Israel. Just like Ishmael and Isaac could not both be heir to God's promise, Esau and Jacob could not be either. The other thing to remember about what we talked about last week is that discussion about the twin's birthright. You may remember that Jacob gave Esau some stew upon the condition that Esau would give up his birthright to Jacob. Esau did not care about this blessed promise from God at all, and Jacob understood its meaning and its importance. The truth is, these matters will be important things to remember as this story unfolds, but the passage we have shared today focuses on Isaac and Rebekah.

This story will sound very familiar, because the same thing that happens to Isaac, happened to Abraham 100 years before or so. Verse 1 says there is a famine in the land. So, Isaac, perhaps starts to head for Egypt, or at least has the idea to head for Egypt, where there would be more food and water for his people. He gets as far as Gerar, and encounters Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. That is the point when God appears to Isaac and says, "Do not go down to Egypt, live in the land where I tell you to live." And God goes on to reaffirm the promise that, if Isaac and his people will stay in Canaan, then God will bless them. God reaffirms the promise that his people will inherit the promised land. Well, Isaac decides to stay in Gerar where there are wells and food, and live among the Philistines instead of following what was probably God's directive, to go back to Beersheba and trust in the promise that God would take care of them. And, just like the story about Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah is a beautiful woman, and Isaac is afraid they will kill him in order to make Rebekah a part of Abimelech's harem. So, he decides to lie to Abimelech, and tell him that Rebekah is his sister, just like Abraham did so long ago. One day, Abimelech was standing at a window of his palace, and he looks out and sees Isaac caressing Rebekah in a way that would only be appropriate between a husband and wife. So, Abimelech calls Isaac before him and says to Isaac, "Rebekah is your wife, why did you tell me that she was your sister?" Isaac responds, because I was afraid I would lose my life on account of her. So, Abimelech says to Isaac, "What is this you have done, one of the men might have slept with her and then brought guilt on us." So, the king issues an order that anyone who molests Isaac or Rebekah will be subject to the penalty of death. And then, Isaac comes to know God's blessing with a crop that yields a one hundred-fold at the time of the harvest. But the Philistines are envious of the blessing that Isaac has been given by God, and they decide to interfere with the water supply in order to hurt Isaac and his people. Then, Abimelech asks Isaac to move away in order to avoid these problems. And so, Isaac moves his people to Beersheba, which is probably where they started from in the first place. Upon moving to Beersheba, a land that had been occupied by his father many years ago, God came to Isaac and reaffirmed that promise that Isaac and all of his descendant will know God's blessing. In fact, they will be God's chosen people. So as Abraham had done in the past, Isaac built an altar to the Lord. Isaac pitched his tent in Beersheba and dug a well, and continued to know God's blessing. He was so blessed, that it caught the attention of Abimelech. And Abimelech came to Isaac, and Isaac said, "Why have you come to me since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" Abimelech tells Isaac that he could

see that Isaac is a man who has God's blessing. So, Abimelech is very cautious about doing anything to harm Isaac because he does not want to feel the wrath of God against him. Abimelech is afraid that Isaac is becoming so powerful that he might use his power against the kingdom of the Philistines, and so Abimelech wants the two men to swear an oath of peace. And Abimelech reminds Isaac that he did not treat Isaac with hostility, but rather he treated Isaac fairly, in spite of the fact that Isaac lied to him. And he reminded Isaac, that he was asked to leave the area of Gerar, only to avoid the friction between the two peoples, a situation not unlike Abraham and Lot. Too many people in a small area causes disputes. So, the two men swear an oath of peace. Isaac's people find a well with fresh water, and they continue to know God's blessing in the land that it was God's will for him to occupy.

One point that I found interesting is that King Abimelech was still in power almost 100 years after Abraham encountered King Abimelech back in Genesis, Chapter 20. The explanation is one of three things. Either, Abimelech lived a long time, and some people did back then. Or, the Abimelech in this passage, is the son or grandson of the King in Genesis 20. Or, Abimelech is the name of the kingship. An example of this is that all generations of kings in Egypt are called Pharaoh. My guess is that King Abimelech is an offspring of the king that Abraham encountered many years before, but that is just my guess.

I think that one of the most valuable lessons we learn from this passage is that people from generation to generation are prone to making the same mistakes over and over again. That is demonstrated by the fact that Isaac responds almost the same way that Abraham did when facing a situation that is almost exactly the same. Isaac responded the way he did because he was afraid. I think that a very important lesson for you and me to learn from this passage is, that sometimes it seems easier to run away from the struggles of life and of faith, rather than persevering and facing the obstacles that we face in the process of answering God's call to serve and to love and to shine his light into the world. When we encounter a famine, or a pandemic, how will we respond? Will we run to a greener pasture, or will we stay at the helm and add strength and love and support to the people in the world around us?

I also thought that it was interesting to note that Isaac was quick to remember that he was treated with hostility when the people were envious of his blessing, but Isaac had to be reminded of the fact that he was treated fairly when he had lied to the king. Also, the reason that the king asked him to move was not really personal, but rather, the king was just trying to find a solution to the conflict that his arisen in his kingdom. Sometimes it is much easier for us to remember the times in life when we feel that we have been treated wrong, but it is not as easy for us to remember the times when we were treated with grace and mercy and forgiveness.

I also thought that it was interesting that God used the negatives, and I mean the struggles with the Philistines about the wells. God used those bad things in order to shepherd Isaac back to the place where God wanted him to be in the first place. Isaac ended up in the places that God was talking about when he said, "Live in the place where I have told you to live."

Also, look at the roll that fear played in this story. Isaac is afraid, so he at least thinks about moving to Egypt rather than staying in the promised land and trusting in God to take care of him. It is fear that causes Isaac to lie to the king, thus putting himself and his wife at risk, not to mention not honoring God. We are going to stop here, and next week, we will talk about Esau and Isaac, and the battle for the birthright of their father Isaac. Live in the land where I tell you to live.

Let us pray...