

### Isaac's Sojourn in the Land of the Philistines

#### Genesis 26:1-16

Genesis 26:1-16 - *"There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> Then the LORD appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."*

*<sup>6</sup> So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. <sup>7</sup> And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She is my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "She is my wife," because he thought, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold." <sup>8</sup> Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. <sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, 'She is my sister'?"*

*Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'"*

*<sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us." <sup>11</sup> So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."*

*<sup>12</sup> Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. <sup>13</sup> The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; <sup>14</sup> for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup> Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth.*

*<sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."*

#### Background Notes

Genesis 26 is the only chapter in which Isaac is the main character. He's mentioned in other chapters, of course, but chapter 26 concentrates exclusively on the patriarch, Isaac. There are many commentaries written on the life of Abraham, Isaac's father, and there are many commentaries on Jacob, Isaac's son, but you don't find many commentaries on Isaac himself. Isaac comes across the pages of Scripture as just an ordinary every-day believer! So let's learn some lessons for ordinary believers.

During a time of famine, Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar (v1). Back in chapter 20, Abraham went to the very same place, and he also contacted Abimelech of the Philistines. Most likely, this is a different Abimelech,

because these two events are separated by more than ninety years. Abimelech was probably a title, similar to “pharaoh,” rather than a name. In fact, the word “*Melech*” (as in “*Abi-melech*”) means “king” in Hebrew.

To protect his own life, Isaac lied to the Philistines, and said that his wife Rebekah was his sister. I wonder where he learned that trick? Like father, like son! Remember, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah – not once, but twice! He lied when he went to Egypt (Genesis 12), and again when he went to the land of the Philistines (Genesis 20). One day Abimelech looked out a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah (v8)! As a result, God delivered Isaac and Rebekah from what could have been some very sad consequences to Isaac’s sin of lying.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God keeps His promises, in spite of believers’ mistakes.

God made significant promises to Abraham and his descendants in the Abrahamic Covenant (see Genesis 12). These promises included material and spiritual blessings. They included the promise of the land of Canaan. They included the promise of many descendants. They included the promise of the coming Messiah through Abraham’s lineage, the “seed” through whom all the earth would be blessed. Here in Genesis 26:3-4, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were reiterated to Isaac.

It was understood that the recipients of the Abrahamic Covenant would stay in the land of Canaan, the land that God was giving them. Even during a time of famine, the patriarchs were not supposed to leave the land - they were to depend on God. Abraham had to learn that lesson the hard way, when he wrongly went down to Egypt.

Now Isaac had to learn this lesson as well. During a time of famine, Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar. The Philistine territory was in the land of Canaan, but it was located on the way to Egypt. That’s the point of verse 2, where it appears that Isaac intended to keep on going all the way to Egypt. This would have been a big mistake. It would have meant that he was doubting the Lord, and not really believing the promises of God to care for him in the Land. Verses 2 and 3: “*Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.”*”

“*All these lands*” (v3) would include the territory of the Philistines, where Isaac received this message from the Lord. So Isaac obeyed the Lord and did not make the mistake of going on down to Egypt. That’s the good news! But then comes the bad news: Isaac became afraid that the Philistines would kill him in order to gain possession of his beautiful wife Rebekah. So he lied about his wife. That was more than just a “mistake”- it was sin. It was a lie, and lying is sin! Isaac had to be rebuked by Abimelech, a pagan king. Isaac was saved from what could have been very serious consequences.

*“Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him” (v13-14).*

Get this now! This event took place during a time of famine, but in the same year as the Lord spoke to him, Isaac reaped a hundred fold! The Lord continued to bless him (v13)! God was keeping His promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, *in spite of* Isaac’s mistake of planning to go down to Egypt, and his sin of lying about his wife. These decisions were wrong, and God would have to deal with the sin, but God was still blessing Isaac. God keeps His promises, in spite of the mistakes of believers.

Have you made serious mistakes? What about a major sin? Well, here’s the good news! Even though God must discipline us for our sin, He doesn’t take away his promises. We don’t lose our salvation. God doesn’t stop loving us, guiding us, protecting us and caring for us - even when He must discipline. He keeps His promises - in spite of believers’ mistakes!

## **2. God keeps His promises, in spite of the hostilities of unbelievers.**

The Philistines envied Isaac because of his prosperity, so they plugged up all the wells that his father’s servants had dug when Abraham lived in that area. To stop up someone’s well was an act of war, because wells were essential to life in this arid region. But in spite of the envy and hostility of the Philistines, Isaac was blessed. God was keeping His promises. Verse 16 indicates that Isaac grew even mightier than the Philistines.

God keeps His promises today, and the hostility of unbelievers around you can’t stop God’s blessing! The hostility of unbelieving neighbors, or family members, or employers, or governmental officials cannot stop God from keeping His promises to you.

Romans 8:31-32: *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* Do you believe that promise? No amount of hostility can stop Him! Look at verse 31 again: *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

And look at Romans 8:35: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”* There’s a lot of hostility against believers out there, but what’s the answer to the question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” It’s obvious - **nothing!**

And the love of Christ certainly includes His promises. Times may be tough and the road may be rough, but God’s care and protection and presence and provision and love for you will always be there. Do you believe this? These are solid promises in the word of God, and God keeps His promises, in spite of the hostility of unbelievers.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Don't give the unbeliever a reason to rebuke you.**

Isaac lied about his wife and Abimelech - a pagan king - had to rebuke him! This was not much of a testimony, was it? Abimelech, an unbeliever, a pagan, was more honorable than Isaac!

Have you ever been rebuked by an unbeliever? When I was in high school I caused a disruption in a study hall one day. I tried to shift the blame by saying to the teacher, "Maybe Bob did it." The teacher, who was not a believer, said to me, "No, Bob would not have done that, because Bob is a Christian." Wow. That really hurt. I was a Christian, but obviously I didn't have much of a testimony. I learned a great lesson that day. Don't give the unbeliever an opportunity or a reason to rebuke you!

As in the case of Isaac, there are often an "Abimelech" or two watching us from some vantage point. Let's make sure our lives are a good witness for the Lord! Don't give the unbeliever a reason to rebuke you.

### **2. Don't copy the sins of your parents!**

When Abraham lied about his wife Sarah, Isaac wasn't yet born, but Isaac may have learned about these major mistakes from Abraham and Sarah, with instructions to be careful not do the same thing. But actions speak louder than words; and Isaac copied the sin of his father. This lesson is not just for young people – it's for all of us, no matter our age.

Don't copy the sins of your parents!