

Isaac Moves Back to Beersheba and Makes a Treaty with Abimelech

Genesis 26:17-35

Genesis 26:17-35 - *"Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. ¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.*

¹⁹ Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. ²⁰ But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah, ²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

²³ Then he went up from there to Beersheba. ²⁴ And 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 My servant Abraham's sake." ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

²⁶ Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. ²⁷ And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?"

²⁸ But they said, "We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'"

³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

³² It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." ³³ So he called it Sheba. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. ³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. ³⁵ And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah."

Background Notes

Isaac is sometimes called the ordinary son of an extraordinary father, Abraham, and the ordinary father of an extraordinary son, Jacob. While that is true, in the second half of Genesis 26, Isaac exhibited some extraordinary virtues! We'll look at these under our doctrinal points.

The Philistines didn't like having Isaac living in their area. Isaac was becoming more prosperous, and the Philistines were jealous of him (v14). Isaac was also becoming increasingly powerful, and the Philistines feared him (v16). Incidentally, this shows that the Philistines were not as plentiful and powerful as they were later, in the days of King Saul and King David - and this is exactly what archeological evidence indicates. It's more support for the historical accuracy of the book of Genesis!

While the land of the Philistines was part of Canaan, and God had told Isaac that he could live there temporarily during the famine, God did not want Isaac to live there permanently, "flirting" with the paganism of the Philistines - even though Isaac prospered materially in that area. The Philistines continued to stop up the wells that Isaac dug, or claim the water for themselves in order to drive Isaac away. Rather than fight, Isaac continued to back off and move in order to avoid friction.

Finally Isaac returned to Beersheba, where Abraham had lived, and the Lord appeared to him the very night he returned! This is a good indication that God wanted Isaac to live in Beersheba. The Lord did not appear to Isaac until he came back to Beersheba. There is a difference between the Lord's blessing and the Lord's presence. The fact that Isaac did not build an altar when he was in the land of the Philistines, but he did build an altar when he moved back to Beersheba, indicates that his heart was now back - and right with the Lord again.

The treaty that Isaac made with Abimelech (v26-31), appears to be a reaffirmation of the treaty that Abraham made with the earlier Abimelech back in Genesis 21.

Doctrinal Points

1. True meekness is not often seen in the believer, but it can be.

Meekness is defined as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment, even when you have the power and means to retaliate." Our Lord Jesus was meek. 1 Peter 2:23 says: "*who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...*" **That is true meekness!** In Genesis 26 Isaac exhibited this virtue. When the Philistines stopped up his wells, or claimed the water, Isaac did not fight or retaliate. He could have, because verse 16 says that he had grown mightier than the Philistines. In the interest of peace, however, Isaac did not fight or retaliate. "*Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there.*" An artesian well in that area is unbelievable! To give up an artesian well without a fight shows true meekness. Isaac was an "ordinary believer," but he showed true meekness.

True meekness is not often seen in believers - but it can be! Like Isaac, we can show true meekness, but it is not easy, especially when our reputation or our money are involved. Would you give up an important position or an important possession, in the interest of peace? That is true meekness! True meekness doesn't mean that you capitulate to others in

your principles, and it doesn't mean you have to become a doormat. True meekness is choosing not to fight or retaliate in the interest of peace.

I think Billy Graham is an example of a believer who shows meekness. Over the years many negative "shots" have been taken at Billy Graham, but rather than retaliate with public statements, Billy Graham has shown true meekness in the interest of maintaining peace among Christians. You might say, "Yeah, but I'm no Billy Graham! I'm just an ordinary believer." Well, so was Isaac, and Isaac showed true meekness." Remember, true meekness is not often seen in the believer, but it can be!

2. True forgiveness is not often practiced by the believer, but it can be.

True forgiveness is not often practiced by believers - but it can be. When Abimelech came to make a treaty with Isaac, Isaac could easily have said, "No way!" After all, as Isaac rightly said to Abimelech, "*Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?*" (v27). But the Philistines said, "*We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace.'*" (v28-29).

Everything the Philistines said in verse 29 was a bunch of lies! They had broken the treaty that Abraham had made, they had stopped up or stolen the wells that Isaac had dug, they had forced Isaac to leave their land - and Isaac had never threatened them! But now Abimelech asked for a peace treaty, and what did Isaac do? He practiced Romans 12:18: "*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*" Isaac forgave Abimelech in the interest of peace. He made the treaty.

Notice that Isaac did not ask Abimelech to formally apologize or make reparation to him for the stolen wells. No - he completely forgave him, and sent Abimelech away in peace. Now that is **true forgiveness!**

When we forgive, it is usually on *our* terms. We're generally looking for something in return – at least a formal apology! Is that true forgiveness? Remember how the Lord forgave those at the cross: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*"

The fact that Isaac's servants found water that very day (v32) seems to be God's stamp of approval on Isaac's act of forgiveness. It reminds us of Proverbs 16:7: "*When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.*" True forgiveness always meets with divine approval.

True forgiveness is not a matter of the character of the person we're forgiving, but rather of the character within **us**. God has granted us true forgiveness; we should show the same to others - especially to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ephesians 4:32 says: "*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*"

Isaac was an ordinary believer with all kinds of shortcomings - just like us - but Isaac showed true forgiveness here. Is there anyone that you need to forgive right now? Is there a Christian brother or sister you need to forgive? In heaven we will forgive one another – so why not do it now? True forgiveness is not often practiced by the believer - but it can be!

Practical Application

You can be an effective witness from the sidelines.

When Isaac was living in the midst of the Philistines, he was not a very effective witness - in fact, he was a negative witness. However, when he moved away from the land of the Philistines and back to Beersheba, he became a much more effective witness. Look at what Abimelech said, *“We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you...’”* (v28). Quite an effective witness!

In verse 29 Abimelech said, *“you are now blessed of the Lord.”* Isaac became an effective witness to the Philistines from the sidelines. It reminds us of Abraham in reference to Sodom. Lot moved into Sodom, but was not an effective witness there. Abraham was on the sidelines. Read Genesis 15, and you’ll see that Abraham was able to effectively witness even to the king of Sodom - but he never moved into Sodom!

Do you see the lesson? Some Christians think that they have to get involved in all kinds of worldly things in order to be effective witnesses to the world. No! You can be an effective witness from the sidelines. Let’s not leave the sidelines and run away, like most of the disciples did at the trial of our Lord. And let’s not leave the sidelines and get too involved in friendship with the world, like Peter did when he warmed himself at the world’s fire during the Lord’s trial. He actually ended up denying the Lord! We can stand our ground and witness effectively from the sidelines.

Recently we invited about 15 neighbors to a “get acquainted buffet,” and we used that evening as an opportunity to get to know one another and share a little bit about our lives. Our goal was to try to become friends, and to open up ways to witness effectively to them. We don’t have to get involved in all the stuff that they’re involved in - and believe me, there’s a lot! We witness effectively from the sidelines!