

Genesis 26, Isaac the Heir of Abraham

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Overview

Relation to Context

Question: what is this chapter doing here?

- Makes no reference to Jacob, who is the main theme of the section.
- Seems to be out of order; if Esau and Jacob had already been part of the family, it would have been much harder for Isaac to pass Rebekah off as his wife (v.7).

Answer: Note references to Abraham

- Statistically, they are concentrated here. 7 in this chapter; only 9 in the other 10 chapters of “the generations of Isaac.”
- Thematically, the chapter draws many parallels between the lives of Abraham and Isaac. See separate list on “Isaac and Abraham.” Notably (and we shall consider these in more detail as we proceed),
 - Seed promised through a barren wife
 - Wife compromised during a trip motivated by famine
 - Interactions and covenant with the King and people of Gerar (Abimelech, probably a dynastic name like “Pharaoh”)
 - Prosperity leads to competition with others (Lot; Abimelech’s herdsmen)
 - He handles this competition by withdrawing, not by fighting
 - Abimelech and Phicol confess that “God is with thee”
 - Receives a blessing from a foreign king (Melchizedek; Abimelech)
 - Isaac renews his father’s wells and calls them by the same names, culminating in Beersheba.

Moses has introduced the struggle between Jacob and Esau over the birthright, a struggle that culminates in the theft of the blessing in ch. 27. Intervening between these two episodes, the present chapter serves two functions, each rebuking one of the sons.

1. In rebuke of Esau, It shows what it means to be the chosen patriarch. It is to “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” and enjoy the blessing that God gave him. Here we see the similarity between Isaac and Abraham, particularly with regard to the blessings that God gave him. This is what Esau is throwing away. Particularly since this this appears to be a flash-back, Esau may be presumed to know this history.
2. In rebuke of Jacob, it shows how Isaac imitates Abraham’s handling of strife by turning the other cheek. Abraham did this with respect to Lot; Isaac does it with respect to the contention over wells.

Internal Structure

See separate chart. The chapter is divided into three scenes, marked by Isaac’s nomadic journeys:

- vv. 1 (to the city of Gerar)
- 17 (to the valley of Gerar)
- finally 23 (back to Beersheba).

The first and third scene are longer than the second, and correspond in containing

- a divine blessing
- interactions with Abimelech king of Gerar
- discussion about wells.

1-16, Sojourn in Gerar

1, Setting

1 famine ... Abimelech ... Gerar.—In keeping with the theme of Isaac as Abraham’s successor, Moses begins by reminding us of two events at opposite ends of Abraham’s life.

- A famine-motivated journey reminds us of Abraham’s trip to Egypt in 12:10.
- Isaac’s choice of Gerar as a refuge reminds us of Abraham’s covenant with Abimelech in 21:22ff. (“Abimelech” is probably a throne name, like “Pharaoh,” and may not be the same individual with whom Abraham dealt.

2-5, Covenant Blessing

God has spoken to his father, and to his wife, but this is the first record of God’s words to him personally. The point of the paragraph is to renew the covenant promises made to Abraham.

The blessing has three parts:

1. The command, v.2
2. The promise, v.3-4
3. The motive, v.5

2-3a, The Command

God’s promises are regularly associated with commands:

Command	12:1 “get thee out of thy country”	12:2b “be thou a blessing”	13:14 “lift up thine eyes”	13:17 “arise, walk through the land”	26:2,3a “Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: 3 Sojourn in this land, :”
Promise	12:2a “I will make of thee a great nation ... bless thee”	12:3 “I will bless ... curse ...”	13:15-16 “all the land which thou seest ... to thee will I give it”	“for I will give it thee”	26:3b “and I will be with thee, and will bless thee”

There are two possible relations between a command and a promise. They can be marked explicitly, but if the command and promise are coordinated, we have to think a little harder to figure out which is intended.

- Sometimes the command is the condition for a promise. The marked form is “If you do X, then I will do Y.” Example: Exod 23:22 (speaking of the angel of God’s presence who was to go with Israel through the desert): “But **if** thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; **then** I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.” The causal direction is from the command to the promise: obedience to the command causes the promise to be fulfilled.
- Sometimes the promise is given as an assurance supporting the command. The marked form is “Do X, because Y.” Example: 13:17, “Arise, walk through the land, **for** I will give it thee.” You may go freely anywhere in the land, because it is all yours. In this case, the causal direction is from the promise to the command. The promise enables the hearer to step out in faith and fulfill the command.

26:2,3 is unmarked. What is the direction? A good clue is the parallel command and promise in v.24, again concerned with Isaac’s place of residence. This time, the relation is explicit: “Fear not, **for** I am with thee, and will bless thee.” So here, the sense is, “The famine has made you afraid to stay in the land. Don’t be afraid and run off in panic. In spite of the famine, I will be with you and bless you. So stay here in the land of promise.”

3a-4, The Promise

In fact, the promise is the renewal of God’s original unconditional promise to Abraham, extended now to Isaac as his son and heir. It is presented in two steps, first a summary of general principles in 3b, then a series of specifics, all referring to details of the promise to Abraham, in 3c-4.

The division between summary and detail is defined by the parallel with v.24, and by the citation from Gen 22.

3b, The Summary

“I will be with thee, and will bless thee.” These two promises are simple but profound, and will repay our meditation.

I will be with thee.—Two characteristics of this promise when it appears in the Bible.

1. It often encourages God’s people in times of difficulty: “If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere.”
 - a. 28:15, Jacob fleeing Esau
 - b. 39:2,21, Joseph in slavery and in prison
 - c. Jer 1:8, 19; 15:20, Jeremiah in the face of opposition to his prophecy
 - d. Jer 30:11; 46:28, the nation through chastisement
 - e. Isa 43:1-5, promise to Israel in times of trial.

2. It is ultimately messianic. Messiah’s name is “Immanu-el,” God with us. This name was initially given when Judah was threatened by a powerful military coalition of Syria and Israel, Isa 7. The Lord’s departing promise was, “Lo, I am with you always,” Matt. 28:20.

I will bless thee.—When God blesses someone, he gives them “vitality, prosperity, abundance, fertility” (TDOT p. 294). Cf. v.12, where God’s blessing is explicitly linked to a bountiful harvest.

Unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries.—This single element, selected from the details to be enumerated later, is important because it deals with the question at hand, the wisdom of staying in a land of famine. If God can deed these lands to Isaac and his descendants, this shows that he has authority over them, and can certainly provide for Isaac even in time of famine.

There is a subtle difference between this promise of the land and that to Abraham earlier (e.g., 13:15; 17:8). The previous promises are all that God will give Abraham the land (singular). Here the promise is of a gift of “all these lands” (same noun, but plural)—not just Canaan, but all the other lands as well. (The only plural of “land” thus far in Genesis is 10:5, 20, 31, in the table of nations.) In Messiah, Isaac’s seed will indeed rule over all nations; here, the point is that God has authority not only over Canaan (to command Isaac to remain in it), but also over Egypt (to command him to stay away from it).

So God encourages Isaac to remain in the land with the assurance of his Presence and his Blessing. There will be trying times, but only under God’s personal supervision and care, and with his creative power always ready to intervene. Thus Isaac, like us, is assured that “all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purposes” (Rom 8).

Ch. 26	Ch. 22
3 I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father;	16 By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD
	17 That in blessing I will bless thee,
4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven,	and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore
and will give unto thy seed all these countries;	and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;
and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;	18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed

3c-4, The Details

These begin with a reference to “the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father.” The only reference to God’s swearing an oath in Abraham’s history is 22:16-18, and the details here follow that promise closely. Isaac was a witness to this instance of the promise on Mt. Moriah, and God’s reference to it would have special significance to him. Major differences:

- the “blessing” in 22:17 is an introductory summary, and has already been reflected in 26:3.
- The gift of the countries to Isaac corresponds to the gate of the enemies in 22, showing that Israel’s dominion over all the earth is in view.

5, *The Motive*

The motive, like the details of the promise, is drawn from 22 (v. 18). There we observed that Abraham's obedience cannot cause the blessing, because it was already given unconditionally in ch. 12. Rather, according to Heb. 6:17, it causes the assurance embedded in the solemn oath. The effect is as though "because" modified "I swear" in v.3 (although that would be an awkward connection in and of itself). See notes on "tempt" in Gen 22:1: to show us what God knows.

It is noteworthy that God traces the promise to Abraham's obedience on Mount Moriah, when in fact it is point for point the same promise he made long before that obedience, in ch. 12, and that he sealed unconditionally in the covenant ceremony in ch. 15. How can he describe the blessing as resulting from Abraham's obedience, when in fact it had already been declared without condition? Three NT passages may help keep things in perspective.

1. Gal. 6:7, "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It would make God's holy law a mockery if men in rebellion against him were to receive his blessings.
2. Eph. 2:10, "good works ... which God hath foreordained that we should walk in them." God saves us without any merit on our part, but then proceeds to make us godly, so that in due time the blessing fits the recipient. His promise of heaven to the penitent sinner is like oversize shoes that a mother buys a child, realizing that he will grow into them. Recall the question in the Methodist ordination ceremony: "Are you going on to perfection?" Every true child of God is actively engaged in a process that will one day make us like Christ. Abraham stumbled many times before reaching the point of ch. 22 (compromising Sarah twice; taking Hagar). That he finally fits the blessing is not to credit him, but the Lord who has patiently developed this godliness in him.
3. Rev 4:10, "the four and twenty elders ... cast their crowns before the throne" and give all praise to God. In the end, we will all acknowledge that whatever blessings God has attributed to our obedience, are in fact ultimately due to him, for that obedience itself is the product of his spirit within us.

Calvin on 22:15: "The Lord here shows himself doubly liberal, in that he, wishing to stimulate us to holy living, transfers to our works what properly belongs to his pure beneficence." A good parallel is a parent who guides a child step by step through a project that the child could never have done on his own, then praises him to encourage him to persevere.

The amplification of "my voice" as "my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" is interesting, and rules out one interpretation of Rom 5:14. Who are those who "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression"? Not people in general living in a time without law, for Abraham lives in that time, and clearly God's law exists then, for he is subject to it. Rom 5:14 must be referring to those who have no knowledge of God's law (infants, people without contact with the chosen line), and such people exist even today.

6, *Isaac's Obedience*

He does not go down to Egypt, but makes his residence in Gerar. The distinction between the verb here and those in v.2 may be noteworthy. This is the usual word for dwelling; the verbs God used in v.2 indicated temporary, transient lodging. God called Isaac to be a nomad, a pilgrim, but here he moves into the city, apparently living in a house. Contrast vv. 17, 25: in the next two

settings, he is explicitly said to pitch his tent, but here he simply “dwells.” This unwarranted proximity to unbelievers may be partly responsible for the lapse in the next paragraph.

7-11, Dealings with Abimelech

This story has strong similarities with 12:10-13:2 (Abraham and Sarah in Egypt) and 20:1-18 (Abraham and Sarah in Gerar). In all three cases

- the chosen family is dislocated to a strange location
- the husband fears that he will be killed for the sake of his wife
- he represents her as his sister
- the deception is discovered by the pagan ruler
- the ruler rebukes the husband
- and speaks to his own people about them.

Because of this similarity, critical scholars suggest that these repetitions result from the merging of multiple versions of the same original story. So-called “doublets” are one of the main arguments for JEDP and similar theories.

An important weakness of this theory is that the stories are not identical.

- In the Abraham stories, but not in the Isaac story,
 - the wife is taken into the king’s harem
 - and the king pays Abraham a large sum of money.
- The time of the payment differs between the two Abraham stories.
 - It is a bride price, offered before Sarah is taken, in Egypt,
 - But a propitiatory offering, offered as she is returned, in Gerar.
- The deception is discovered in different ways in each story:
 - Illness in Egypt
 - Divine revelation for Abraham in Gerar
 - Direct observation by the king for Isaac in Gerar
- The subsequent attitude of the king toward the patriarch differs:
 - Pharaoh expels Abraham from Egypt.
 - Abimelech invites Abraham to stay in Gerar
 - Isaac is asked to leave Gerar, but later and for other reasons.

There is another explanation for these similarities, both within Abraham’s life and between Abraham and Isaac.

Why might Abraham fall into the same trap twice? Answer: Which of us does not have weaknesses that pop up repeatedly in our lives? Abraham is a meek man, as we see in his handling of the dispute with Lot in ch. 13, or his yielding to Sarah in ch. 16. He is not self-

assertive or self-confident; such a man would be much less likely to cast himself on the Lord. In fact, meekness is given in Psa 37:11 as one of the characteristics of those who will inherit the earth, along with waiting on the Lord (v.9), being righteous (v.29), and waiting on the Lord (v.34)—such are the ones who, like Abraham, are blessed of the Lord (v.22). The benefit of his meekness is that he more easily submits himself to the Lord. The downside is that he more easily falls into fear and depression if he gets his eyes off of the Lord, and we should not be surprised that it happens more than once.

Why might Isaac fall into the same trap as his father? Answer: One of the sobering lessons we learn is parents is how our children often exhibit our weaknesses. They are frequently a mirror that shows us our own faults. Isaac, like Abraham, prefers to yield rather than fight, as we see in the disputes over wells later in this chapter. Furthermore, while he was not yet born on the two occasions when Abraham compromised Sarah, he may have heard of these events—he is most likely the custodian of the family history that has become our book of Genesis. Knowing that his father used such a ruse could only have emboldened him. Given the overall purpose of this chapter (to emphasize that Isaac, unlike either of his sons, is walking in the steps of his father Abraham), this explanation is entirely credible.

Application: This episode exhorts us to caution in our relations both with unbelievers and with godly predecessors.

- Toward unbelievers, we must not confuse godly meekness with a fearfulness of men. Cf. 1 Pet 3:14-16. V.14 tells us that we are not to be afraid with the fear that men's trappings of authority seek to instill in us, while v.15 reminds us that we are still to conduct ourselves in a meek attitude, fearing God. Gen 26:7,9 make it very clear that Isaac is motivated by the fear of men. We ought not to let a natural disposition toward meekness that inclines us to faith, also tempt us into an ungodly fear of men.
- Toward those who have gone before us in the faith, we must recognize that they are human and fallible. Paul was aware of this, when he wrote in 1 Cor 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, *even as I also am of Christ.*" His example was worthy of imitation only so far as it was true to the Lord. We should value the testimony and example of those who have gone before, but recognize that they are fallible, and look directly to the Lord as our final authority. It is no blasphemy to reject the teaching of our elders if it conflicts with the Word of God, or to turn aside from their example if it differs from the commandments of the Lord.
- Note also Abimelech's fear of God, perhaps inspired by the experience of his father or grandfather in the parallel event with Abraham (ch. 20), when God revealed himself directly to Abimelech. Just because a person is an unbeliever doesn't mean they have no moral sense. They may manifest the "law written in their hearts," Rom 2:15, more clearly than some believers manifest the law of God preserved in the Scriptures.

12-16, Business Dealings

This paragraph emphasizes three further similarities between Isaac and his father:

1. The practical effect of the Lord's blessing;
2. The resulting strife with unbelievers;

3. How they handled it.

12-14, God's Blessing

This is the only record of agriculture among the patriarchs, but modern Bedouin culture shows that they do combine sowing and reaping with nomadic pasturing. In fact, in some pastoral cultures (notably the Val d'Anhiver in Switzerland, active down to the first decades of this century), the shepherds follow an annual route, planting crops on their way out from their winter home, and harvesting them on the way back.

Isaac sowed.—In a time of famine (v.1), this is an act of faith. Psa 126:5-8 captures the anxiety of the farmer putting seed into the ground. He can eat it now but have no harvest later; but if the rains fail and it does not grow, he has lost even this meager food.

[He] received in the same year an hundredfold.—The Lord rewarded his faith. Matt. 13:8 shows that a hundredfold return (100 pounds of seed harvested for each pound sown) was considered an exceptional return in a good year, not to mention a year of famine. Indeed, “the LORD blessed him.”

And the man waxed great ... For he had ... flocks ... herds ... servants... the Lord blessed him.—The fruitfulness of his crops was only one of many areas of prosperity in his life. This description recalls two passages concerning Abraham, one at each end of his life.

- Early in his pilgrimage, when he had compromised Sarai in Egypt, 12:16 records, “[Pharaoh] entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.” This was an ungodly gain, a bride-price that should never have been paid, realized only because Abraham forsook the Lord; “the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15).
- But at the end of his pilgrimage, in 24:35, his servant bears this testimony to Laban and his family: “And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.” This list includes everything that Pharaoh had given him, and in addition “silver and gold.”

Abraham's wealth might be suspect, because on two occasions it was augmented by pagans in the context of denying Sarah: 12:16 and 20:14,16. But Abraham recognized that the Lord, not men, was to be the source of his wealth, 14:23. The case is much clearer with Isaac. Though he did deny Rebekah, he received no wealth from this duplicity; all the benefit is traced to the Lord's hand upon him.

14-15, Resulting Strife

the Philistines envied him.—The natural man is interested only in his own prosperity. He cannot honestly rejoice in the prosperity of another, even if it comes from the hand of God. The believer, confident in God's care, can rejoice when he sees evidence of that care in the life of another. The unbeliever instead grows envious.

The Philistines ... stopped ... the wells.—The outgrowth of this envy is that the unbeliever tries to impoverish his fellow just as a means of evening the score. In this case, they plug up the

wells that his father dug, even though those wells might be of use to them as well. Recall the old poem,

Said the robin to the sparrow,
'I should really like to know
why these anxious human beings
rush about and worry so.'

Said the sparrow to the robin,
'Friend, I think that it must be
that they have no Heavenly Father
such as cares for you and me.'

Application:

1. Recognize that unbelievers may behave in this irrational way. Instead of being angry with them, pity them for the insecurity that drives them to such actions, and seek to share the Lord with them.
2. When your own heart is tempted to envy or revenge, recognize the company that you are in. Our Lord can command us to “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39) only because we are assured that he cares for us.

16-17, The Solution

Abimelech recognizes the imbalance between Isaac's might and the people of Gerar. This same characteristic was recognized by Pharaoh in the people of Israel in Exodus 1 (vv. 7, 9, 20), and as an unbeliever he responded by oppressing the people. Abimelech may show a more godly attitude by suggesting the same action that Abraham suggested to Lot in ch. 13, and Isaac acquiesces. Abimelech certainly sees his action as peaceable (v.29), though Isaac understands it as an act of animosity (v.27).

17-22, Sojourn in the Valley of Gerar

This episode is very short. It has only three of the five elements that mark the episodes on either side, and serves mainly to join them together by its complementary features in the last element.

17a, Travel

As in 1b and 23, we see Isaac on the move. This time he moves from the city of Gerar to the valley of Gerar, presumably out in the country and away from the main body of population.

Covenant Blessing (none)

In the first and third sections his move is followed by a blessing from the Lord, but there is no such blessing in this case. This is the first of the omitted sections.

17b, Settlement

As in 6 and 25, we have a statement of Isaac's residence. Two verbs are used here: he “dwelt” (as in 6) and “pitched his tent” (as in 25), reflecting his transition between a sedentary city life and the nomadic style that is more in keeping with God's call for his people.

Dealings with Abimelech (none)

Unlike both of the neighboring sections, this one says nothing about relations with Abimelech.

18-22, Business Dealings

In the previous panel, the Philistines showed their envy by strife over wells, and the first paragraph of this section shows that this strife continues. In the next panel, after moving to Beersheba, Isaac is finally able to have peaceful access to a well, which is mirrored in the last paragraph of this section.

18, Abraham's Wells.—Moses emphasizes the similarity between Isaac and his father Abraham by pointing out that Isaac renews his father's wells and gives them the same names his father used. It is likely that the reference here is to the wells described in v.15

- Abraham was in Gerar, not “the valley of Gerar”
- The adversaries are different (Philistines vs. herdsmen of Gerar)
- The opposition is different (strife for the water vs. plugging up)
- The names are different (Abraham's names vs. those original with Isaac).

Moses reminds us of this earlier strife to set the context for the next. Once in the valley of Gerar, he digs new wells, and herdsmen from Gerar contest them. These he names himself to commemorate the strife.

22, An Uncontested Well.—Finally, he is able to dig a well without opposition. He recognizes this freedom as a blessing from the Lord, and an assurance of future provision:

- “For now the LORD hath made room for us.” This is the first instance in Scripture of a common idiom for the Lord's blessing, the notion of being unconstrained and in a large place. Though he has labored hard for this well, his focus is on the divine blessing that it represents, both past and future.
- “We shall be fruitful in the land.” Ever since Genesis 1, “fruitfulness” has been the heart of God's blessing: to Adam and Eve (1:28), Noah (9:1), Abraham (17:6), Ishmael (17:20). From this it appears that Jacob and Esau are not yet born; he is still waiting in faith for the promised seed.

Application: Isaac's behavior during this period shows three commendable qualities.

1. He perseveres in the face of discouragement. Having set his hand to the plow, he does not turn back (Luke 9:62)
2. He does not strive, but repeatedly turns the other cheek, manifesting the attitude commended by the Lord in Matt 5:38-42. Far from being reserved for the Millennium (Scofield), these high standards characterize God's people in every age when they trust in him.
3. He claims no credit for his ultimate success, but recognizes that it is due to God's grace.

23-33, Sojourn in Beersheba

This section is once again comparable with the first section, and corresponds paragraph-by-paragraph with it.

23, Travel

Isaac returns to Beersheba, a place rich with Abrahamic associations.

- “Beer” means “well.” There Abraham dug a well (21:30), over which there was contention (21:25).
- He made a covenant there with Abimelech (21:31-32), leading to the other part of the place’s name, “Sheba” = “oath.” This activity is in focus in the current panel.
- It was Abraham’s home at the time of the Akedah (22:19).

24, Covenant Blessing

As in the first panel, the Lord appears to him, and gives him a command, a promise, and a motive. One additional feature added here (see the table) is the Lord’s identification of himself.

Gerar	Beersheba
² And the LORD appeared unto him, and said,	²⁴ And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said,
	I <i>am</i> the God of Abraham thy father:
Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: ³ Sojourn in this land,	fear not,
and I will be with thee, and will bless thee ; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; ⁴ And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;	for I am with thee, and will bless thee , and multiply thy seed
⁵ Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.	for my servant Abraham's sake.

That same night.—Moses calls our attention to the close temporal relation between Isaac’s return to Beersheba and this appearance of the Lord. Isaac is on the move, and perhaps intends to encamp only for the night. But Abraham had established a sanctuary there (21:33), and the Lord calls him to pause and worship.

I am the God of Abraham thy father.—As we have seen, the theme of the entire chapter is the continuity between Isaac and Abraham. In the first covenant vision (2-5), this was explicit in the Promise (“the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father”) and the Motive (“because that Abraham obeyed my voice”). Here, at his father’s sanctuary, the Lord reminds Isaac that he is more than the source of a blessing and commands to Abraham; he was the recipient of Abraham’s devotion and worship. All men benefit from gifts from God, and all are subject to his commands, but not all return to him in worship. Abraham acknowledges the Lord as his God,

- building altars (12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 22:9; cf. 21:33)
- “calling on the name of the Lord” (12:8; 13:4; 21:33), an activity that involves public proclamation of the Lord (cf. 4:26).

That relation needs to be confirmed to each succeeding generation. Compare

- Gen 28:13,21-22, the Lord introduces himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob must decide whether the Lord will be his God as well. If he does accept the Lord as his God, then he must establish a sanctuary for him.
- Ex 15:2 “my God ... my father’s God”

At Moriah, Isaac came to a crisis of faith, recognizing the Lord as the source of life. But he was not yet actively worshipping the Lord. Abraham’s life was marked by building altars and “calling on the name of the Lord”; up to this point, Isaac’s life is marked by digging wells and calling their names (vv. 18, 20, 21, 22).

25. Settlement

Three actions are recorded at Beersheba (“there” 3x). The order is significant.

he builded an altar ..., and called upon the name of the LORD.—This is the first record we have of Isaac’s engaging in public worship. It is the very first thing mentioned, even before “pitching his tent.” This shows the priority that he assigned to worship, after the challenge of the Lord’s vision. “I am the God of Abraham—am I your God as well?” Here we see a clear answer, “Yes.”

He pitched his tent there.—This time there is no reference to a permanent dwelling, only to pitching his nomad’s tent. Perhaps he has learned the dangers of cleaving too closely to the world.

Isaac's servants digged a well.—The verb used differs from that in the previous verses (18, 19, 21, 22), and suggests that here they *began* to dig, a task that is only completed in v.32 (which uses the more common verb denoting the whole task). This activity, previously the focus of his attention, has been deferred to the point that it can only be begun.

Technical note: Two words are used for digging wells: *xpr* and (2x only, Gen 26:25; Num 21:18) *krh*. The more common word actually means "search for," and is not used for digging graves, only or wells or traps. The distinction between the two may be captured in the comparison between Gen 26:25 (*krh*, when the digging begins) and v. 32 (where *xpr* is used). Perhaps *xpr* indicates a completed search, one that has in fact found the water, while *krh* describes any generic activity, and might be applied to a dry hole.

26-31, Dealings with Abimelech

Note parallels with Abraham in ch. 21.

Abimelech ... Phicol.—Are these the same as in ch. 21? They may very well be. Consider the Chronology:

- Isaac is at least 40, because he is married, but probably not yet 60, when Jacob and Esau were born.
- The covenant in ch. 21 is apparently made at the time of the weaning of Isaac, when he was about 3.
- If Abimelech were 40 in ch. 21, he could now be no more than 80 or 90, not unreasonable.

Genesis 26, Isaac the Heir of Abraham

22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham,	26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army.
	27 And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?
saying, God <i>is</i> with thee in all that thou doest:	28 And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee:
23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: <i>but</i> according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.	and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, <i>even</i> betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; 29 That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace:
	thou <i>art</i> now the blessed of the LORD.
24 And Abraham said, I will swear.	
25 And Abraham reprov'd Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. 26 And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I <i>of it</i> , but to day.	
27 And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. 28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. 29 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What <i>mean</i> these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? 30 And he said, For <i>these</i> seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. 31 Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they sware both of them. 32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba:	30 And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. 31 And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another:
then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.	and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

Isaac said unto them.—Like Abraham, he has a bone to pick with them. In this case, it is the unceremonious way in which they invited him to leave Gerar. He went meekly, but did not hesitate to raise the issue when opportunity presented itself. This behavior is an important qualifier to our notion of turning the other cheek. We are not to revenge ourselves, but neither are we to let ourselves be trampled, and we certainly may seek redress through peaceful means.

We saw that the Lord was with thee.—The past tenses refer to the period when Isaac dwelt among them. They saw the prosperity he enjoyed, and recognize its divine origin.

When they asked Abraham for a covenant, it was based on the observation that “God is with thee” (21:22), while here they use the covenant name of God. It is perhaps noteworthy that Abraham’s proclamation of the name of the Lord in this region takes place *after* the covenant with Abimelech (21:33), while here it has just taken place (v. 25), and apparently serves to educate the Philistines concerning the true name of Isaac’s benefactor. We see here the value of *worship* for *witness*, compare 1 Cor 14:24-25.

We have not touched thee.—Though Isaac feels slighted at his discharge from Gerar, they remind him that things could have been much worse. They at least protected him from harm.

Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.—This declaration of God’s blessing by a king outside the official line of promise is parallel to Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham in ch. 14, and continues to emphasize the parallel between Abraham and his son.

He made them a feast.—Note the association of this feast with the making of a covenant. Such feasts are common in the Bible: compare

Genesis 26, Isaac the Heir of Abraham

- 2 Sam 3, David's covenant with Abner, a former enemy
- Exodus 24, the elders of Israel eat and drink with God at the formation of the covenant of Sinai.
- The Lord's Supper is the culmination of these covenant feasts. The original supper marked the initiation of that covenant, and when we celebrate it together, we are bearing witness that we are in that covenant. This is why it is important that the participants be known to one another as members of the covenant.

32-33, *Business Dealings*

Here we see the completion of the well that was begun in v. 25. Having been challenged by the Lord, Isaac gave first priority to worship, rather than to the well-digging that had preoccupied him up to this time, and the Lord rewarded him with a flowing well at the site of his father's sanctuary. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Matt. 6:33.