

GENESIS

26:1-35

Genesis 26:1-35

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 18th February 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Nehemiah 13:23-27

Introduction

As you know, we are working our way through the book of Genesis, around a chapter a week, verse by verse. And what a rich book this is. It covers a vast period of time — almost 2000 years — dealing with 4 main events, and 4 main characters, though there are many more we meet along the way. But as we've seen it also speaks much of Jesus, pointing to Him and His sacrifice for us in so many ways. And it has so much to say to us today. It's really no exaggeration to say we ignore this book at our peril.

Last week we ended with a stark warning, seeing how Esau chose the instant over the ultimate, trading his birthright for a bowl of stew. And while that seems (and was) a crazy thing to do, it was what he wanted in the moment, and indeed what he chose. But just as when we choose instant gratification, success or pleasure over our *ultimate* good, or the good of *others*, he also was not free from the *consequences* of his choices. And this morning, we'll sadly end with yet another example of how Esau followed his heart, clearly not realising that doing so is the problem, not the solution.

Overview of chapter twenty six

Overview of chapter twenty six

- **v1-6** — Famine, promise and obedience
- **v7-11** — Like father, like son
- **v12-33** — God blesses, the world oppresses
- **v34-35** — Esau marries

We'll start though as *Isaac* faces a problem that *his* father, Abraham also faced — though in *his* case he heeds God's warning to not make the same mistake. But remarkably, in the very next verses (from 7-11), we'll see him repeat exactly what Abraham did in a *different* situation, and he'll receive a similar rebuke (a rare stumble of this Godly man). From verses 12-33, we'll see Isaac and his family move around, encountering frequent opposition, as God continues to bless them. Then we'll come back to his firstborn, Esau.

Chapter twenty six

Starting in verse 1 then, we read:

Genesis 26:1

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.

So then, Isaac has been living in *Beer Lahoi Roi*, so named after Hagar's encounter with God in chapter 16, with the place name meaning "the well of living after seeing". In a sense *she* had found living water here; a trust and obedience in God, returning to Abraham and Sarah as God had instructed. But now there is a famine in the land, and it seems this prompts Isaac to move south, symbolically moving away from this living water.

Now, this might sound familiar to us, for Abraham had done the same at the time of that earlier famine in chapter 12. He had left Bethel (that place name meaning *the house of God*) and headed for Egypt, symbolic of the world, not only putting his and Sarah's lives at risk, but also returning with Hagar, through whom would be the opportunity to compromise in the years to come. But here, Isaac has not yet ventured as far as Egypt, though perhaps it had crossed his mind, for we read:

Genesis 26:2

Then the LORD appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you.

So, God says "don't make the mistake your dad did of forgetting that I said I would bless him, and instead venturing to the world for help" but rather, stay here in the land I tell you to:

Genesis 26:3

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.

In other words, God is saying to Isaac, and to us; "don't go to the world to solve your problems, but go where I want you go, and stay where I want you to stay."

Indeed, wherever *God* wants us is where we should be. It might not initially seem as attractive as another land, or another choice. But don't doubt that God will provide and bless you if you obey – whether in relationships, family, career, or ministry. To Isaac, God continues saying:

Genesis 26:4-5

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; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

And so God confirms the promises he made to Abraham, but noting that these promises now extended to Isaac *because* of Abraham's obedience. And furthermore, He is now calling for Isaac's obedience too. So what does he do?

Genesis 26:6

So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

That is, Isaac obeyed, and didn't go to the world for help in time of need (such as Abraham had in that earlier famine), but relied on God. And there is such an important lesson for us in that. For it's awfully tempting to rely on what we think we know, and what the world tells us to do. But our obedience must be to Christ, not to our hearts, nor to this world.

However, while Isaac didn't go as far as Egypt, we see that he stays here in Gerar near the southern border of Israel, not far from Gaza today. Why is that significant? Well, he has moved about as close to Egypt as he can without actually going there. And that is worryingly like us, right? We see how much we can get away with. We know it's wrong to cross the line, but we convince ourselves that standing as close as we can to that line of compromise is somehow a good idea. Whether a flirty text, or suggestive comment, or doing something that isn't *technically* gambling. But like Isaac, we set ourselves up for disobeying the Lord.

And though unlike Abraham he had remained in the land, he now found himself repeating a different one of his father's mistakes. We read:

Genesis 26:7

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."

So we see that obeying God in one way doesn't mean opportunity to sin in another will be removed. And here, he makes the same error as Abraham did in chapter 20, trying to pass off his wife as his sister. But while Abraham had some form of defence, that Sarah was actually his half-sister, that is not the case with Isaac and Rebekah — this is a bare faced lie.

Now, parents, we should especially take notice of this situation — for Isaac is walking in his father's footsteps, and not in a good way. And the reality is that *our* children will learn a lot from *us* — whether good or bad. And so we must seriously consider how the things we do or don't do will set a precedent for *them* to follow.

Indeed, if the things of the Lord are unimportant to *you*, they will probably be unimportant to your *kids*.

That is, if they never once see you go to a prayer meeting, home group, or evening service, they'll probably not see the need either. If they never see you serve in any practical way within the church, then it probably won't cross their mind. If they never see you show hospitality to others, they'll be less inclined to do it themselves. If they never see you reading your Bible, do you think they will listen to you when you quote it? Or do you think they will read it themselves? If you never pray with them, will they ever pray with *their* children? And of course your attitude to sin — even your acceptance of it — will have a lasting effect in their life.

Likewise, the extent to which you and I pursue holiness, righteousness, integrity and wisdom, will have a lasting effect in what they set their affections on. It's not that our examples are guarantees of how our children will turn out, but you only have to look at how often so many people's children follow after them, to realise we need to take our responsibility seriously. The pattern we set is one that they are likely to follow.

Of course, not only is this incredibly important for parents, but also for those in ministry. If you are a pastor, elder, trustee, deacon, youth club leader, children's group or Sunday school leader, small group leader, member of the band, or in any public ministry — the example you set is one that will influence others in their decisions, and your actions (good or bad) may give the perception of permission for someone following in your footsteps.

And in reality, no Christian is off the hook here. For we are *all* to be an example to each other. To Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote:

1 Timothy 4:12

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

And to the Philippians he warned:

Philippians 3:17-19

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

Isaac certainly followed in his father's footsteps as a man who knew God, who obeyed Him, who followed His lead. He was a Godly man, and we see God blessed him greatly. But we also see how he fell into the same mistakes as his father, here trying to pass off his wife as his sister. But as Moses would later warn the Israelites saying "be sure your sin will find you out" — so it was only a matter of time before *Isaac's* lie was found out. We read in verse 8:

Genesis 26:8

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.

Evidently, given that this was a long time after they had been there, they had done a good job at keeping up the pretence (and maybe Isaac thought he'd got away with this whopper) — but it wasn't possible to hide it forever. And Abimelech had questions:

Genesis 26:9

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.' "

Now, you may recall when we looked at Abimelech in chapter 20, that I noted that it was a title as much as a name — and so it is possible this was the son of the Abimelech who lived and at the time of Abraham's error. But either way, the response is the same, here calling Isaac's words and actions to account. Now, not only was Isaac wrong to lie, but in doing this he failed to faithfully represent Christ as he had done so previously, for he was not willing to die on account of his bride — whereas Christ came to this earth specifically to do so. A reminder to us to represent our Saviour well!

However, what is good here is Isaac's response — for he is honest, and he is calm. He doesn't fly off the handle saying "how dare you accuse me of lying!" or "it's none of your business!". He doesn't try to justify his actions, but simply explains what he was thinking. May we also be as honest, and as calm, any time that someone calls us out for our sin. Not lashing out in response. Maybe this following comment from Charles Spurgeon will help with that:

A man who says "I was wrong" really in effect says "I am a little wiser today than I was yesterday"

Charles Spurgeon

Now, Abimelech, like with Abraham, keeps his questions and statements going:

Genesis 26:10

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."

Isaac should not have concealed that Rebekah was his wife. And I think there's some application there in that since our culture clearly has wedding rings as a symbol of marriage (or in other words "hands off!") we should be very cautious of not wearing them in public — including at the gym.

However, Isaac didn't merely make an unwise choice, he was deceitful. And so understandably Abimelech is upset. But he is also honourable here, for he now makes abundantly clear that no-one is to touch Rebekah:

Genesis 26:11

So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

First, this is a real show of integrity. His quick reaction is a great example of how we should back away from *anything* once we discover it is sinful, and not proceed any further— whether in business, relationships, or life. A similar situation today would be if, as an unmarried man or woman, you discover the person you like is married or in a relationship, you back well away the moment you discover that fact.

But second, the severity with which he demands this of his people, is no doubt due to the words that God had previously spoken to him or his father about Sarah, when God had spoken to him in a dream saying ""Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." That's not something you easily forget about!

Now, with the dust settling from this rare mistake of Isaac's, we read:

Genesis 26:12

Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him.

With Isaac having obeyed the Lord in not having gone to Egypt, and with this sin of his admitted and dealt with, God is now able to bless him. And He blesses him greatly!

Genesis 26:13-14

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.

Now, he was already starting from a rich point, having received all Abraham's inheritance. Then God blessed him a hundredfold, then blesses him more, and more, and more! And what happens? Those around him envy him:

Genesis 26:15-16

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. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

So, they had made efforts to stop him prospering like his father did, but now they say "Go away!" because they are starting to get worried about Isaac, his family and his servants. Much the same as Pharaoh worried when he saw how numerous the Israelites were in Egypt some years after this.

Genesis 26:17

Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

And so he is gradually moving away from Gerar, and back among the places his father had lived:

Genesis 26:18-22

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. Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarrelled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarrelled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. 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."

So, Isaac goes back to wells that Abraham had dug, and digs them again — but at the first one he is met with resistance, with the Philistines claiming it was theirs, and so he names it Esek, meaning *contention*. The same happens at the second, so he names it Sitnah, meaning *hated*. Finally at the third one he finds peace, and he credits God with leading him and his family to that place.

And in this, there are a few things for us to consider.

First, a couple of Bible commentators point to water being symbolic of the Bible, which indeed it is elsewhere in scripture. And they note that wherever and whenever there is a return to the Word, whether in our personal lives, or in our churches, **there will always be opposition**. And I know *that much* to be true from personal experience...

The number of times that the Lord has started doing something here, or in other places, and almost immediately the enemy uses something or someone to try and discourage. And it comes in all manner of forms — comments, texts, emails, absence, apathy, even insecurities in my own life that the enemy loves to play on. And indeed, the enemy would *love* to stir up contention and strife among us. Even today. And about trivial things. Getting us to hear things in the way they were never intended. Causing accusations. Talking behind each others backs.

And as we move into a season (I hope and pray) of us sharing the gospel more and more actively in our town, I know there will be opposition from the enemy — for he doesn't want to see that happen. And just maybe, he'll use some quarrelling against us, or even among us to accomplish his purposes.

But therein is our **second** lesson. For look at Isaac here. How does he respond? Does he get contentious about these matters? No. He simply gets up, moves on, and goes to find more water. And this is the character of this man — we see no retaliation when Ishmael mocked him, we see no arguing when Abraham laid him on the altar of sacrifice, and **we see no quarrelling here** as his rights were challenged by the Philistines. But again, what we do see is he keeps going after more water, returning to the wells his father had dug, which if we once again consider water symbolic of the Bible, reminds us that when we are faced with any opposition, the place we must go is back to the water of the Word. Indeed, whenever I'm feeling anxious about something, going to the Word is what I need to do. That is where I find comfort, peace, instruction, wisdom, and the rebuke that I need. It's the place we should all go.

Third, as we read these verses, we're starting to see tensions build in the land. Ultimately, God would take Isaac's descendants to Egypt to strengthen them, protect them from these nations, and bring them back victorious. But at *this* moment, we see Isaac confident that the Lord had led them here, and evidently that is the case for we next read:

Genesis 26:23-24

Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 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."

So despite the opposition, Isaac is not to fear. He's not to react out of fear, nor take matters into his own hands. But trust that God knows what He is doing. And Isaac's response to this incredible assurance is the same as ours should be to *our* blessed assurance:

Genesis 26:25

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.

He worships the Lord, he makes that place of worship his home, and he once again digs for water — and in our case that is the Word of God. And we read:

Genesis 26:26-27

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

It's a fair question!

Genesis 26:28-29

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, 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.' "

I can't help but think of what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:7, that *"When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."* — I believe speaking of individual people in our lives who see our character, and are ultimately drawn to what they see of Christ.

But here, the Philistine's motivation was that of self-preservation, for they could see how much God had blessed Isaac, how great he had become. And likewise the world will be peaceful toward Christian's and he church when it is convenient for their own purposes.

Genesis 26:30-31

So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 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.

Once again, no contention from Issac, only hospitality, and making peace.

Genesis 26:32-33

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." So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

In other words, he re-iterates the name Abraham had given this place back in chapter 21 as he himself had made a covenant with Abimelech there, and thus called this place "well of the sevenfold oath", pointing back to the lambs he gave Abimelech. And that is the last we see of Abimelech in the book of Genesis.

Now, as Moses finishes this account, and before he starts recording the next major event (that we'll get to in chapter 27 next week) he records what can seem a small detail or insight into Esau's life. But it is one with a profound warning for us. We read:

Genesis 26:34-35

When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

So, like Isaac married at 40 years old, so does his eldest son, Esau. But there is massive contrast in whom they each married. For remember that Abraham had been very specific to his servant back in chapter 24, saying *"I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."*

And indeed, Rebekah — whom God led Abraham's servant to — was a godly girl, willing to pray, willing to listen to the Lord, not willing to blame Him, or complain to Him. But here, we first see that Esau marries not one but *two* women, something the Bible never prescribes or endorses, and second that he marries two Hittite girls from the land in which they lived. And we read of the sadness this brought to both Isaac and Rebekah.

Now, let's be clear, they were not sad because they were somehow racists or bigots or snobs. No, no. They were sad because Esau had married two girls who had no regard for the Lord, for these giant nations worshipped other gods, and as we see time and again throughout the Old Testament, they were frankly wicked nations, full of evil practices. And these girls were not good news — so much so, that by the time we get to the end of the next chapter we read:

Genesis 27:46

And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

And so at the start of chapter 28 we read this firm warning from Isaac to their other son, Jacob:

Genesis 28:1

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan."

You see, it wasn't personal — it wasn't that Isaac and Rebekah simply didn't like these two girls. For that would have no bearing on who Jacob should marry. But rather it was their spiritual state that was the issue, for that affected their whole lives.

And considering this, I would be negligent to not underline again the wholly consistent message the Bible delivers to those desiring to marry, that no Christian should marry an unbeliever.

Of course, part of that is practical common sense — for if you really are walking with the Lord, if the things of Him are taking priority in your life, if what the Bible says is more important than what culture says, if keeping sex for marriage is more important than fulfilling your lusts, then you will not comfortably get on with someone who wants no part in that.

But most seriously it is about how it will affect your walk with the Lord, your serving of the Lord, the way you raise your children, how you tithe, and how you make all your decisions. And ultimately, to do so is to disobey the Lord. There is much that could be said on this subject, but in closing I want to point you back to Malachi chapter 2 which we studied just under 3 years ago, where we read:

Malachi 2:11

Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned The LORD's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god.

As I said at the time, those are serious words – Treacherously. Abomination. Profaned. **What** was the issue? It was that they had married the daughter of a foreign God.

Why was it an issue? Was it about so called inter-racial marriages? Not at all. God was and is not upset by skin colour, accent, hair colour, or facial features. The problem was not marrying the daughter of a foreigner but of a foreign **god**.

For what that brought to Israel time after time, was idolatry. And it'll do the same to you if you marry a non-Christian. Your priorities will not be the same.

You see, like us, no doubt Israel had prioritised the wrong things that the other person would bring to a relationship – they're funny, they're cute, they're attractive, they have the same hobbies, likes, dislikes, they like the same movies, music, and food as us. They love me, they get me, they're so nice. That may all be true, and it's not that those things don't have their place, but what we often ignore is that the other person's priorities are completely different.

To the non-Christian, family time is more important than church time. Saving for a holiday is more important than giving to the church. Hobbies are more important than serving practically at the church. And there is no agreement on the things that really matter – from how you conduct yourself in a relationship, in marriage, in business, in life. From how you raise your children, to how you treat others. And in how important the Bible is.

For Christians, marrying a non-Christian will cause conflict in the use of your time, your finances, your home, how you raise your children and in your relationship with God. If it doesn't then your relationship with God is already in trouble. Now that's not to say if you are already married to an unbeliever that you should leave them – no, no. In fact the Bible says the very opposite, that you might win them to Christ. But no Christian should voluntarily put themselves in that position.

As for Esau, we've already seen how he couldn't help himself, and prioritised the instant over the ultimate, selling his birthright for a bowl of stew. And now once again, he married not one but two women from the nations around them who worshipped false gods, rather than choosing a bride who had grown up believing in the one true God. Of course, to do so may have meant waiting. It may have required effort on his part — as we'll see from his brother in the coming chapters. But it would have been better to remain single and faithful to God, than to marry and be disobedient to Him. And that's true for each one of us too.

Conclusion

Surely, there's no such thing as an irrelevant passage of the Bible! There is always so much for us to learn, and to apply. And apply it we must. The Word of God is the water by which we must be washed — and it will do us no good to merely look at it. We *must* apply it to our lives.

Application questions

Let's close then with some questions to think on as we go our way today:

- Are you standing perilously close the line of compromise?
- Parents, are you setting an example in obedience and faith that you want your children to follow?
- When you are rightly rebuked for doing wrong, do you take it patiently?
- Are you honouring God in your romantic relationships?

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



Deal Christian Fellowship

Simply teaching the Bible, simply

 <https://dcf.church>