

GOD BLESSES ISAAC'S FAMILY

Genesis 26:1-35
Key Verse: 26:3a

Lesson 12b

"Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you..."

Isaac was blessed by God because of his father Abraham. To be blessed by God is good; but it is not always easy to bear God's blessings. Isaac did not know how to grab God's blessings aggressively, but he knew how to bear God's blessings. In this chapter, Isaac lives among the Philistines. Because of God's blessing and training and with God's help, Isaac was a good influence to the unbelieving world around him. We can learn from Isaac's life among the Philistines how to live as God's people in a godless world, and how to bear God's blessings.

1. Life among the Philistines (1-22)

Isaac was on his way to Egypt because of the famine in the land of Canaan. He was following in the footsteps of his father Abraham, who had gone down to Egypt during a famine. Abraham's excursion to Egypt had not been made by faith; and Abraham had been a spiritual failure there.

Because of the famine, Isaac was on his way south. He came to Gerar in Philistine territory. Isaac was afraid of the powerful and wild Philistines. Abimelech king of the Philistines was especially intimidating. Perhaps he was the son of the Abimelech who, earlier on, had intimidated Abraham. Isaac planned to get out of Gerar as soon as possible. But the Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you..." (3) Then God reiterated his covenant promise to Abraham, and made it a personal covenant with Isaac. He said, "For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." Isaac listened to God's word; he accepted God's promise. He obeyed God's command. "So Isaac stayed in Gerar."

The children of godly parents must have faith of their own. The time comes when each one must make a personal covenant with God, and a personal decision to obey God's commands. This was the time when Isaac came to have faith of his own.

The command to stay is sometimes harder than the command to go. Many people do not want to put down roots, for commitment is costly. It is easier to simply pull up stakes and move on. There are many "tramp" Christians. They stay in one place as long as they find some benefit to themselves, but they

never think of taking any responsibility or of trying to give to others. God says to them, "Stay in this land for a while, and I will bless you."

Isaac obeyed God and stayed, but it was not easy, for he was afraid. His fear becomes evident in the lie he told the Philistines. He took a page from his father's book and said of his wife Rebekah, "She is my sister." He thought to himself, "The men of this place might kill me because of my wife, for she is very beautiful." It was the same lie Abraham had told--and for the same selfish reason, to protect himself.

But this time, Abimelech was not fooled. He kept his eyes open and one day he caught Isaac and Rebekah behaving not at all like brother and sister. When confronted, Isaac confessed, and explained his fear, and Abimelech generously provided protection.

The first hurdle was over, but the fight was just beginning. God kept his promise. Even though the famine was severe, God was with him and Isaac prospered. Every time Isaac dug a well, water bubbled up. His crops produced a hundredfold because the Lord blessed him. Isaac became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. It was good to be blessed by the Lord, but there was one problem--the Philistines became envious. They began to harass him. His flocks and herds increased, and he needed a lot of water. Isaac was using wells that had been dug in Abraham's time by Abraham's servants. These wells were clearly Isaac's wells. The Philistines didn't try to claim them; they just stopped them up. It was as though Satan was trying to cut off the blessing of God which had flowed to him through his father Abraham.

Isaac continued to prosper in spite of the harassment, so one day Abimelech told him plainly, "Move away from us. You have become too powerful for us." But God had said, "Stay in this land." So Isaac moved out of the town into the Valley of Gerar. There he continued to prosper.

The Philistines became more aggressive. They began to claim his wells as their own. Isaac's servants dug a fresh well in the valley of Gerar. But the Philistine herdsmen quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So Isaac named the well "dispute" and he moved on and dug another. We don't know how many times this happened, but evidently it became a way of life for Isaac. How hard it must have been for him to stay in the land of the Philistines, and continually give in to their harassment! But God had told him to stay, so he stayed--and kept digging wells. God kept his promise. He was with Isaac and he blessed him.

We don't like to give in or to see a man give in like Isaac did. He seems to be a wimp. We would rather see a man fight and win. But Isaac's way resembles Jesus' way. He trusted in God's blessing, so God blessed him. Isaac was fighting a spiritual battle.

Isaac fought his enemies with "giving-in-faith." He did not fight for his rights; he did not fight even for the wells that belonged to him. When the Philistines who envied him demanded a well that he had just dug, he gave in and dug another. Each time, God blessed him with abundant water--even in the time of famine. He trusted God, so he could give in.

Wells of water were more precious than oil wells in that famine-ridden land. To find fresh water every time he dug a well was a miracle--and a sure sign of God's blessing. The wells Isaac dug represented God's life and blessing poured out on him.

2. Do not be afraid (23-25)

But in the course of living this kind of life, great fear came into Isaac's heart. He finally found a place where he could settle without being harassed. He named that well "Room for me," and should have been at peace. But it was here that fear caught up with him. Perhaps it was the accumulation of fears built up during the years of giving in without a fight. When fear invades a person's heart, it immobilizes him. It drives out faith and trust.

So Isaac went to Beersheba. He seemed to live a passive life, avoiding any struggle with men; but actually, he was very active--he struggled with God. His wealth and success came from God. He went to Beersheba to pray and seek God. That night, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Isaac worshiped God. He accepted God's word, built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. He pitched his tent there and his servants dug another well. This was a turning point in his life. His situation had not changed, but his heart had. His old gnawing fear was gone. He depended on God, not on himself.

The change in Isaac was perceived by the people he had feared most--King Abimelech and General Phicol. When they came to him, he took the initiative and asked, "Why have you come? You were hostile to me and sent me away." They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a treaty with you, that you do us no harm.'" They recognized Isaac as God's servant. They acknowledged that all of his blessings had come from God. These two godless men saw God in Isaac and they wanted to be his friends. They became believers in God, and men who feared God. Isaac's humble and faithful life bore fruit in the godless society of his time. Isaac welcomed them and prepared a feast. They ate together and left in peace. And Isaac's servants came saying, "We dug another well and found water!" May God's people live among the people of the godless world in such a way that men may come to God. God wants his people to be a holy people and a kingdom of priests in the world.