

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 26

26:1 Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. (NIV)

Time Frame

It is likely that part of this account occurred before the birth of the twins, during the 19 years that Rebekah was barren; otherwise it was after the boys were grown. The entire account shows Isaac confronting situations similar to those Abraham experienced before him.

Abimelech

This may have been the same Abimelech with which Abraham dealt, although unlikely since "Abimelech" was a title used by the kings who ruled in the land of the Philistines. Hundreds of years later David feigned madness before an Abimelech—the king of Gath (1SA 21:10-14, PSA 34).

26:2 The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. (NIV)

Egypt

Isaac could not go into Egypt because he represented the children of God [ROM 9:7-8--"Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."(NIV)] The children of God have come out of Egypt—the world—and are not to return to it.

26:3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. (NIV)

God's Obligation

God had an obligation, and no matter what Isaac wanted to do, God's fulfillment of His promises took precedence.

26:4-5 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 [NKJ: "commandments"], **My decrees and My laws.**" (NIV)

Requirements of the Covenant

The requirements of the Sinaitic covenant were identical to the actions of Abraham. "Love the LORD your God, and keep His requirements, His decrees, His laws and His commands always" (DEU 11:1, NIV).

26:6-7 So Isaac stayed in Gerar. When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." (NIV)

"She is My Sister"

Isaac used the same line as Abraham did (20:2). If the twins had been born by this time, it would have been difficult to hide the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah.

26:8-9 When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing [NKJ: "showing endearment"; TAN,NRS,MOF: "fondling"] his wife Rebekah. So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her."

Abimelech

If this were the same Abimelech, he probably would have referred to Abraham's example from years before.

26:10-11 Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests [NKJ,NRS,MOF: "touches"] this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." (NIV)

This was different from the earlier example. Abimelech pronounced a death sentence here while God pronounced a death sentence in the case of Abraham and Sarah.

26:12-13 Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. (NIV)

Blessings for Isaac

This is the second time in the account that Isaac received God's blessing.

26:14-15 He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. (NIV)

Well Dispute

Similar contentions existed when Abraham was there (21:25).

26:16-18 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us." So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them. (NIV)

Since Isaac was born in the area and helped his father dig the wells originally, he would remember what they had been named.

26:19-20 Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek ["contention"], because they disputed with him. (NIV)

This situation was similar to what happened between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot (13:7).

26:21-24 Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah ["hatred"]. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth ["room"], saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land." From there he went up to Beersheba. 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." (NIV)

Talking to Isaac

Just as God had spoken to Abraham after he had separated from Lot (13:14-17) and renewed His promise of land and great prosperity, so He now does with Isaac. This is the third time the blessing of Isaac is mentioned.

26:25 Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. (NIV)

Isaac's Actions

Just like Abraham, Isaac dug a well and built an altar there (21:30,33).

26:26-29 Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath ["a company"; one Targum translates this: "with a company of his friends"] his personal adviser [NKJ: "one of his friends"] and Phicol the commander of his forces. Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since 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 sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the LORD." (NIV)

Making a Treaty

Just as Abimelech and Phicol had come to Abraham and acknowledged the power of God with him, so these men now do to Isaac, and likewise want to make a covenant.

26:30-31 Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace. (NIV)

Isaac, like Abraham, made a covenant with the leaders of the Philistines.

26:32-33 *That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" He called it **Shibah** ["oath"], and to this day the name of the town has been **Beersheba** ["well of the oath"]. (NIV)*

Renaming the Well

With the reopening of the well, Isaac renames it with the original name since the name had been abolished after the well had been filled and sealed. On both occasions of the naming of the well, an oath had been made—first with Abraham, then with Isaac.

26:34-35 *When Esau was forty years old, he married **Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief**[MOF: "which was a bitter disappointment"] **to Isaac and Rebekah.** (NIV)*

Esau's Wives

The Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem both say that the wives were addicted to idol worship and rebelled against anything Isaac or Rebekah asked them to do.