

# LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

GENESIS 26:1-35    MAY 11, 2022

Did you see the footage of Mike Tyson pummeling a fellow passenger on a recent flight? It was decided that no criminal charges will be filed.<sup>1</sup> Watch the whole video and you see that the man kept tormenting Iron Mike. He even threw a water bottle at him.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath many said the guy got was coming to him. *After all*, he wouldn't stop provoking the champ.

In our text tonight, Isaac is provoked a lot. His antagonists don't throw any water bottles at him, but they *do* ruin his water wells. Isaac is provoked by famine, fear, foes, and even his own family. As we see him react to these situations we can see where he was successful and where he came up short.

This passage is interesting because it is the *only* chapter where Isaac is the main character. But, everything in it is a repetition of something his father, Abraham, dealt with in *his* life.

When we watch a movie sequel, we expect them to do some new things. Reviewers get angry when it's just the same old plot done a second time. Think *Home Alone 2* or the *Pirates* sequels.

But, when we're talking about our regular lives it's good to remember that there's nothing new under the sun. No difficulty you and I face is a *new* experience that God has never had to deal with. No challenge is uncharted, no provocation is unprecedented. They may be new to us, but they're not new to the Lord. He's given us the record of Scripture so that we can receive His navigation for the challenges that we will face. Paul referenced these Old Testament stories and said, "These things happened as examples, and they were written for our instruction."<sup>3</sup> So, we see the same thing happening to Isaac that happened before, but that's *good* because similar things are going to also happen to *us*! Let's examine Isaac, who faced a variety of provocations in chapter 26.

**Genesis 26:1 - There was another famine in the land in addition to the one that had occurred in Abraham's time. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, at Gerar.**

We're not given enough details to be sure *when* this took place. Some think it was before Isaac had his boys, some think it was after. It was at least 40 years after Abraham had his interactions with Abimelech in Gerar. So, this is likely the *next* Abimelech, the son of the one we met before.

Isaac finds himself in the midst of a famine. When we are provoked by something out of our control - like a famine - what should we do? Isaac packed up and set off toward the coast. It's what his father had done before. But there's a spiritual component, too:

**Genesis 26:2-6 - <sup>2</sup>The Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land that I tell you about; <sup>3</sup>stay in this land as an alien, and I will be with you and bless you.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sportingnews.com/us/boxing/news/mike-tyson-punch-passenger-airplane/rinx9kursz3jvxxmjtd2oahj>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.as.com/other\\_sports/mike-tyson-hits-airplane-passenger-provoking-him-v/](https://en.as.com/other_sports/mike-tyson-hits-airplane-passenger-provoking-him-v/)

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11

**For I will give all these lands to you and your offspring, and I will confirm the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. <sup>4</sup>I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, <sup>5</sup>because Abraham listened to me and kept my mandate, my commands, my statutes, and my instructions.” <sup>6</sup>So Isaac settled in Gerar.**

Perhaps Isaac was on his way to Egypt and so had to be told *not* to go down there. After all, that is what his dad had done. In multiple ways we'll see Isaac following in his father's footsteps, but he seems to have a selective memory. He doesn't seem to remember that some of these ideas his dad had ended up causing big problems.

But here we see Isaac provoked by a famine, a high level crisis. What was he to do? In that situation, the Lord provided *leading*. He had to go *somewhere* otherwise his flocks might die. So where should he go? He shouldn't go to natural place (Egypt), but to the place of the Lord's choosing.

One scholar points out that the word for "live in the land" is the Hebrew word that conveys the idea of "tent there temporarily."<sup>4</sup> It reminds us that anywhere we find ourselves in this life is just a temporary lodging place till we make it home. Don't become so wrapped up in anything here that you forget where your real citizenship is.

When Isaac was provoked by famine, he received the Lord's leading and *obeyed*. And in this sweet interchange we see the faithfulness, the graciousness of God, as we always do. Abraham may have been gone, but the covenant was still on. The Lord was still present. He was still going to do everything He said. And, best of all, He said, "I will be *with* you!" This is always what God has wanted. He wanted to be *with* Adam and Eve in Eden. He is Emmanuel, God *with* us. We're told that in the New Jerusalem we'll see His face - that He'll be so close to us, He'll be our light. We'll have no need for the sun or the moon or the flashlight on our phones.

**Revelation 21:3 - Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.**

Notice: *if* Isaac wanted to enjoy that with-ness, he would have to listen and trust and obey. Had he gone down to Egypt, the Lord wouldn't have abandoned him, but Isaac wouldn't have been able to enjoy the blessing that God wanted to give. The Lord said, "*Here's* where you're going to find Me."

**Genesis 26:7 - <sup>7</sup>When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife," thinking, "The men of the place will kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is a beautiful woman."**

After the famine, Isaac was provoked by fear. Once again, he follows in the example of his dad. I guess he forgot how those stories ended. A word to those of us who are parents in the room: Your

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

example matters. You're teaching your kids how to deal with life by the way *you* deal with life. Show them how to trust God and go His way.

When provoked by fear, Isaac chose to *lie*. Here's the thing: Lying does not help you. More importantly, God *hates* it. In Proverbs, the Holy Spirit says lying is *detestable* to the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

When provoked by fear, Isaac should've decided to *be true*. He had just received strong promises from God. That thing he was so worried about needn't have bothered him at all if he remembered what God had already revealed and accomplished on his behalf.

Jesus has told us, outright, that we do not need to be afraid, even of those who can kill our bodies. He's given us His peace as a gift. And so, in this kind of situation, we must walk in the truth. The Apostle John was so glad to hear that the Christians he was writing to were walking in the truth. In fact, he said that he had no greater joy than to hear that.<sup>6</sup>

**Genesis 26:8-11** - <sup>8</sup>When Isaac had been there for some time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from the window and was surprised to see Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. <sup>9</sup>Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, "So she is really your wife! How could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might die on account of her." <sup>10</sup>Then Abimelech said, "What have you done to us? One of the people could easily have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us." <sup>11</sup>So Abimelech warned all the people, "Whoever harms this man or his wife will certainly be put to death."

Isaac would've had to get the king's permission to live in Gerar. In those sort of negotiations it wasn't unheard of for the man in Isaac's position to have to give up a woman into a harem.<sup>7</sup> Still, we have to conclude that Isaac surrendered to fear. He would've known about the *two* times this same thing had happened with his dad and how the lie never worked *and* how God had miraculously protected the family. But, we see that even though he was being obedient to stay where God had him, he wasn't really *trusting* God in faith.

As a result, Isaac crashed on the rocks of hypocrisy. One of the biggest complaints the world has about Christians is that we're hypocrites. And sometimes we are! That doesn't mean we have to be perfect - that's impossible - but we should note how damaging hypocrisy is to our witness.

One way to avoid hypocrisy is to avoid lies. Don't lie to others and don't lie to yourself! Remember: God has led us to a specific place to tent and His desire is that we spread *righteousness* there. Abimelech says, "you're bringing guilt to all of us!" And that throws into relief what the servant of God is *supposed* to be doing in the community - that's bearing fruit, spreading righteousness. In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul says, "always pursue what is good for one another and for all." Isaac fell way short of that when he was provoked by fear.

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<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 6:16-19, 12:22

<sup>6</sup> 3 John 3-4

<sup>7</sup> CSB Study Bible Notes

**Genesis 26:12-16 - <sup>12</sup> Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in that year he reaped a hundred times what was sown. The Lord blessed him, <sup>13</sup> and the man became rich and kept getting richer until he was very wealthy. <sup>14</sup> He had flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, and many slaves, and the Philistines were envious of him. <sup>15</sup> Philistines stopped up all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with dirt. <sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Leave us, for you are much too powerful for us."**

Before we look at the provocation here, pause to enjoy God's grace. His representative had really blown it, but God isn't vindictive. He stays yoked with Isaac and still works in his life.

Having come through the provocation of famine and fear, now Isaac will enter a period of life where he is provoked by his foes. In this first wave, the people he had been living among for quite some time have grown jealous of his success, and so they not only push him away, they actually come against him - vandalizing and ruining his water wells.

Wealth brings problems. We all would like to have a little more than we have, but the more we have, the more trouble we're bound to face. And the problems could become very acute very quickly. The more flocks Isaac had, the more water he would need, right at the time where his access to water was being shut off.

As a side note, we saw how lying doesn't help you. Here God's Word shows us that envy doesn't help you, either. By stopping up these wells and driving Isaac away, these Philistines were hurting their own economy! Don't let jealousy into your heart. It's only going to hurt you in the end.

Derek Kidner points out that, in this provocation, Isaac is trapped between a hostile city and a waterless countryside. What would he do? What can we do when friends turn to foes?

**Genesis 26:17-22 - <sup>17</sup> So Isaac left there, camped in the Gerar Valley, and lived there. <sup>18</sup> Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and that the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died. He gave them the same names his father had given them. <sup>19</sup> Then Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found a well of spring water there. <sup>20</sup> But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek because they argued with him. <sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well and quarreled over that one also, so he named it Sitnah. <sup>22</sup> He moved from there and dug another, and they did not quarrel over it. He named it Rehoboth and said, "For now the Lord has made space for us, and we will be fruitful in the land."**

Today, Christians are still being driven from their homes in places like Laos<sup>8</sup> and even Israel.<sup>9</sup> We are not facing that sort of outright persecution. Maybe we will some day. If we do, it won't be easy, but we can be sure the Lord will be with us. Look at Isaac: He sets up camp in a dried river bed.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/driven-02232022133231.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.insider.com/israel-systematic-attempt-to-drive-christians-out-of-jerusalem-2021-12>

He's got hostile enemies actively destroying his access to water. But the Lord's touch on his life cannot be thwarted. The Lord was with him on the coast, He's still be with him in the valley.

Isaac did not retaliate, he moved on. Then moved on again. He shows a remarkable level of patience. He had trained fighters. Out in the wild, I'm sure you could make a few herdsman disappear without too much trouble. But Isaac just kept digging. The people around him were unreasonable and unfriendly. He comported himself like a gentleman, giving up some of his rights in order to keep peace.

Generally, we *can* be at peace with a hostile world. Not always. At some point persecution becomes so serious that God's people have to take flight. But, in our regular lives, facing foes who are stealing clients from us or cutting in line or making accusations, we're called to live at peace as far as it is possible for us. We do so by responding to provocation with calm and patience and even generosity toward those who come against us. Bless and do not curse.

**Genesis 26:23-25 - <sup>23</sup>From there he went up to Beer-sheba, <sup>24</sup>and the Lord appeared to him that night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your offspring because of my servant Abraham." <sup>25</sup>So he built an altar there, called on the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there. Isaac's servants also dug a well there.**

As the Lord had spoken His promises multiple times to Abraham, so now He speaks multiple times to Isaac. Sometimes we look back at the book of Acts or historic times of revival and wish God would do things like that again. That's ok, but through Isaac's example we see that God's heart is to speak to us here and now, just as He's spoken before. He's not withdrawn. He's just as excited about you as He was about the Church in Acts. He's with us and loves us.

The Lord said: "Don't be afraid." I imagine Isaac felt pretty vulnerable there in the wilderness, surrounded by people who hated him. But no matter how weak our physical position is, we are safe in the Lord's hands. We may have our wells destroyed, but nothing can separate us from His love.

In the midst of this provocation, Isaac not only showed patience and meekness, but we see he responded with worship. He built an altar. He called on the name of the Lord. He focused his attention on his faith rather than his foes.

**Genesis 26:26-33 - <sup>26</sup>Now Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. <sup>27</sup>Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me? You hated me and sent me away from you." <sup>28</sup>They replied, "We have clearly seen how the Lord has been with you. We think there should be an oath between two parties—between us and you. Let us make a covenant with you: <sup>29</sup>You will not harm us, just as we have not harmed you but have done only what was good to you, sending you away in peace. You are now blessed by the Lord." <sup>30</sup>So he prepared a banquet for them, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup>They got up early in the morning and swore an oath to each other. Isaac sent them on their way, and they**

**left him in peace. <sup>32</sup> On that same day Isaac's servants came to tell him about the well they had dug, saying to him, "We have found water!" <sup>33</sup> He called it Sheba. Therefore the name of the city is still Beer-sheba today.**

Abimelech claims they had only done good to Isaac, but he knows that isn't true. He has to admit there is no reason Isaac should be thriving, given all the trouble the Philistines have caused. And yet, it's clear that God is with him. God wants to make His with-ness clear in your life. In a sense, God wants to magnetize your life, drawing the hard, metally hearts of unbelievers toward you so that they can hear about Who God is and what He's capable of and how He saves.

Isaac was gracious enough to be trusted by Abimelech, even *after* being caught in a lie. Isaac was willing to receive his foes. He was willing to endure an offense. He was generous to overlook some issues for the greater good. He doesn't bring up the wells to Abimelech. That's one way he was *different* from his dad. Isaac doesn't *want* to harm his enemies, he wants to be at peace with them and even *bless* them. So he gives them a feast and a place to stay. The fact that Abimelech stayed the night is a testimony to Isaac's graciousness. The king wasn't afraid he'd get his throat cut while he slept.

And we note Isaac's diligence in the face of provocation. He just kept digging wells. There in verses 32 they put another hole in the ground and the Lord meets him there with provision.

So, Isaac is sort of 1.5 for 3 when it comes to dealing with provocation. He's seen it from famine, from fear, from his foes. But there's one more: His family.

**Genesis 26:34-35 - <sup>34</sup> When Esau was forty years old, he took as his wives Judith daughter of Beeri the Hethite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hethite. <sup>35</sup> They made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.**

It's hard to believe that Isaac would've been negligent about his sons' wives, especially when you consider the saga about how his dad dealt with getting him a wife. It says Esau "took" his wives, signaling, perhaps, that he refused to be under his dad's authority on this issue.

The terms used for "making life bitter" can mean these ladies "defied and provoked" Isaac and Rebekah.<sup>10</sup> In the end, we cannot force our family to do what is right or what is Godly. But, when provoked by family we should remain faithful. As we saw last time, toward the end of his life it seems the Isaac slacked off in spiritual things. He becomes more like *Esau* and less like *Abraham*. And it leads to greater family division. We want to follow through in God's grace and power, doing our part to live out the faith for the good of our families.

Are you being provoked by famines or by fears or by foes or by family? God has equipment for you. Don't go all Iron Mike on those around you. Instead, be led, be true, be patient, be gracious, be faithful.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*