

GENESIS 26

Introduction

When God spared the city of Nineveh from the wrath of His judgment, He explained to Jonah that there were in the city "more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left..." (Jonah 4:11). He had pity and compassion on the children and withheld His judgment.

Jonah preached to Nineveh in 759 BC. The Book of Nahum relates the eventual fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians as God's instrument of judgment. The events prophesied by Nahum took place in 612 BC.

God spared Nineveh for the sake of the children, but less than one hundred fifty years later those same children and *their* children were themselves ripe for judgment! Rather than flourishing under the spiritual instruction of their saved parents, they failed.

In the Book of Judges, as one generation awakens to spiritual life, their children are apathetic, then their children grow apostate.

Passing on spiritual passion to children is no easy task. Yet it is one that is dear to the heart of every Christian parent. The Bible is, of course, filled with instruction on how you are "Train up a child in the way he [or she] should go, And when he [or she] is old he [or she] will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). In the Scriptures you also find illustrations on how to pass on spiritual passion as you examine the relationships between many sets of parents and children.

In Genesis Twenty six you find just such an illustration. The spiritual pursuits of Abraham's son, Isaac, are presented to you. Was Abraham successful in passing on his spiritual passion to his son? At first it seems that he was not; Isaac follows the ways of his father and fails. Later, however, something remarkable takes place: Isaac flourishes as he finds his father's wells.

It is instruction in the form of an illustration. If your children only follow in your spiritual ways, if they only imitate your example, they

will fail as Isaac did at first. If they go on to find your "wells" - if they discover the empowering of God the Holy Spirit indwelling them - they will flourish as Isaac did at the last! #1 Your Children Will Fail If They Only Follow Your Ways, but #2 Your Children Will Flourish If They Also Find Your Wells

#1 Your Children Will Fail
If They Only Follow Your Ways
(v1-11 & v34-35)

There are two things in Chapter Twenty six that strike you immediately: (1) Isaac makes the same mistakes that his father made; and, (2) Much mention is made of the "wells" that Isaac either discovered or dug. The first twelve verses, and the last two verses, present Isaac's failures as he followed only the example of his father without an understanding of the empowering available to him - symbolized, as we'll see, by the wells of water.

Faced with famine, as Abraham had been, Isaac sets off for Egypt - as Abraham had done. Afraid that he would be killed because his wife was beautiful, as Abraham had been, Isaac lies about her true identity - as Abraham had done.

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.

Abraham had experienced a famine as a test of his faith; now Isaac's faith is tested. Saving faith is always individual and personal! As you read in the Gospel of John 1:12-13,

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

You can only be born of God one way - by God's grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Among the three ways men think they can be born of God are "by blood," and "by the will of man."

"By blood" means that you think you are saved because of the heritage of your physical birth.

"By the will of man" is better translated, "by the will of your natural father." In other words, people think that the mere influence of godly parents can save you.

It is only by personal faith can your children be saved and walk with the Lord!

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.

God told him *not* to go to Egypt - which tells you that he was on his way there! He had only headed out for Gerar...but in his heart he was going to Egypt.

Often we are on our way to Egypt without really admitting it to ourselves! An objective examination of your life reveals that you headed in the direction of the world - but subjectively you think you are strong enough to resist its temptations in the end.

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.

Genesis 26:4 "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;

Genesis 26:5 "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

Genesis 26:6 So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

God continually repeats His promises to Abraham and Isaac. Repetition and reminder are important, since we are frail creatures prone to many doubts and misgivings. Constant exposure to God's promises in His Word is a necessity.

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."

As his sister, they would approach him asking her hand in marriage - a long, drawn out process that he could stall indefinitely.

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.

Genesis 26:9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she *is* your wife; so how could you say, 'She *is* my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'"

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."

Genesis 26:11 So Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

When God promised Isaac safety, he doubted the Word. Now, when Abimilech promises him safety, he believes it! He thought that the Philistines were murderous adulterers, but he put more stock in *their* word than in *God's* Word!

Our lives are often inconsistent in this same way. You and I live between two worlds: we are on the earth, but we are destined for eternity. More and more we should be realizing that eternity is more solid than earth - even though we only see it by faith. Our inconsistencies should become less and less as we get closer to home.

The remarkable thing about the famine and his fear was that he could not help but see the similarities between he and his father. Nevertheless he follows his father's ways and fails!

It get even more involved! Before we leave this section on Isaac's failures, we ought to examine another one - presented as a lament at the end of the chapter.

Genesis 26:34 When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

Genesis 26:35 And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

Abraham had taken great precautions to select an appropriate wife for Isaac. Isaac here failed to follow his father's example! Esau marries two unbelieving women, and it becomes a source of continual grief to his parents.

On the one hand, Isaac follows his fathers ways and fails. On the other hand, he fails to follow his father's ways!

Children follow your bad example and fail, then fail to follow your good example! Is there any hope for them? Are they destined to repeat your sins and to reject your successes?

The only way I can make sense of this is by what follows in the text. The essential element was not his father's example, good or bad. It was his father's empowering - illustrated by the wells Abraham had dug. "Water" and "wells of water" are often symbols in Scripture of the empowering of God the Holy Spirit:

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

John 4:13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,

John 4:14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

John 7:38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

John 7:39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Isaac's plight reminds me of the Apostle Paul's cry in Romans Seven, where he says,

Romans 7:19 For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:25 I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Following this, in Romans Eight, is a discussion of the empowering of God the Holy Spirit:

Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you...

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

A godly example is not enough! An understanding of God's empowering is also necessary if you are to impart spiritual passion to your children.

#2 Your Children Will Flourish
If They Also Find Your Wells
(v12-33)

The discovery and the digging of wells dominate this chapter. There is no mention of wells during Isaac's failures. His failure with Esau, though mentioned afterward, actually occurred prior to the discovery

and digging of these wells. It was a failure in his raising Esau, long before the events of Chapter Twenty six took place.

After these things, *many* wells are mentioned, some even by name. In verse nineteen it says they found a well of "running" water. The word "running" is the same word that would be translated "living" - they found a well of "living" water! It is a clue to the symbolic meaning of the text. Indeed, spiritually speaking, it is the empowering of God the Holy Spirit that made the difference in Isaac's life.

Genesis 26:12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him.

Genesis 26:13 The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous;

Genesis 26:14 for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.

Genesis 26:15 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.

The idea here is that Isaac had discovered and opened these wells, causing him to prosper even during the great famine. The Philistines had stopped them up, but Isaac reopened them.

The Philistines went about stopping up the valuable wells - even though water was precious. This seems foolish, and it is, but it also carries a lesson for us. You see, the Philistines often symbolize the pride and power of the flesh. Goliath was a Philistine - proud in the power of his flesh. Water, we said, symbolizes the empowering of God the Holy Spirit against the flesh. So it is perfectly consistent that the flesh would seek to inhibit the flow of the Spirit!

Genesis 26:16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

Genesis 26:17 Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

Genesis 26:18 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.

It was when Isaac found his father's wells that he began to flourish - both physically and spiritually. He had followed his father's bad example and failed, and he had failed to follow his father's good example...Now he began to find his father's source of empowering.

Example is important; but example needs empowering in the spiritual realm. Consider the disciples of Jesus Christ. They had *His* example - and what an example it was! Yet they failed in many ways prior to the Resurrection, and especially prior to Pentecost. Why? Jesus said they needed more than a good example; they needed the grace of the empowering Holy Spirit. They needed to be born-again and baptized in the Spirit:

They were born-again just after His Resurrection:

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

They were baptized in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...

All of God's children require all of His empowering...Your children are no different! They need to be born again and baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 26:19 Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there.

Genesis 26:20 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him.

Genesis 26:21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah.

Genesis 26:22 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."

Isaac now discovers and digs new wells, wells of his own. He is finding the secret to spiritual life - the abundant springs of living water promised to those who seek them.

It should be no surprise that his renewed walk caused problems for him among the fleshly Philistines. The flesh gives no place to the Spirit and seeks to inhibit the Spirit's blessings. The flesh *contends* with the Spirit - that is what Esek means, "contention." The flesh has *contempt* for the Spirit - that is what Sitnah means, "contempt." In the

end, though, you can reach Rehoboth in your walk - the "broad places" where the things of the Spirit control you.

Genesis 26:23 Then he went up from there to Beersheba.

Genesis 26:24 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."

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.

Wherever Isaac went he was able to dig a well. You are able to experience the empowering of God the Holy Spirit wherever *you* are!

Genesis 26:26 Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army.

Genesis 26:27 And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?"

Genesis 26:28 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.'"

Genesis 26:30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

Genesis 26:31 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.

Here is something interesting: Isaac follows his father's example *and* his empowering in this meeting with Abimilech. Abimilech and Phichol are titles - like Pharaoh and General. These were not the same men Abraham had dealt with. But Abraham had dealt with an Abimilech and a Phichol. They had come to him to enter into a peace treaty - just as these do now with Isaac. Abraham rebuked them - just as Isaac does now. Abimilech and Phichol were treated kindly by Abraham and sent away - just as these are now by Isaac.

Both a godly example and God's empowering are what your children need to flourish spiritually.

Genesis 26:32 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."

Isaac had a continual supply of water, water in abundance. You are promised the same abundance in the Holy Spirit - "out of your heart shall flow rivers of living water."

Conclusion

You want your children to flourish. Towards that end, they *do* need to see your good example! If they *only* follow your example, they will have problems. They will imitate your vices more than they emulate your virtues! Still, you are called upon to be a worthy example for them to follow. As the Apostle Paul says,

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Colossians 1:10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

1 Thessalonians 2:12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Beyond this, though, there needs to be a thirst for the well! How can you instill that thirst for the empowering of the Spirit in their lives?

Make sure that *you* have such a thirst in your own life! Abraham had dug many wells. Although Isaac ignored them at first, he eventually discovered them for himself.

In the end you see a wonderful balance in Isaac's walk with the Lord. In Chapter Twenty four, you saw him out in the field meditating on the word of God. In Chapter Twenty six he discovers the wells and he is brought to a place of worshipping God - "he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord."

The Word, worship, and the well - a good balance for us to seek in our own walk! Many Christians make the mistake of emphasizing one over the other. They are students of the Word, but shy away from worship or any talk of the Holy Spirit's anointing and empowering. Others emphasize the work of the Spirit and worship to the exclusion of the Word. You need them all in God's proper measure.