

Unit I: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

Digging Your Own Well

DEVOTIONAL READING: Genesis 26:12-23
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 26:1-33
PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 26:24-33

KEY VERSE

He builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well. (Genesis 26:25, KJV)

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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. (Genesis 26:25, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Examine the importance of Isaac's godly heritage.
- Appreciate both the privilege and responsibility of being included in the family of faith.
- Express gratitude to God for those who have passed faith along to us.

*Key Terms

Bless (verse 24)—Hebrew: *barak* (baw-law'): to kneel; boast; greet; pronounce blessing.

Built (verse 25)—Hebrew: *banah* (baw-law'): assembled; constructed; made; "build-ed" (KJV).

Covenant (verse 28)—Hebrew: *berith* (ber-eeth'): to be in league with; alliance; "treaty" (NIV).

Descendants (verse 24)—Hebrew: *zera* (zeh'-rah): posterity; children; offspring; "seed" (KJV).

Multiply (verse 24)—Hebrew: *rabah* (raw-law'): to be or become much, many, or great; grow; "increase" (NIV).

Peace, (in) (verse 29)—Hebrew: *shalom* (shaw-lome'): completeness; soundness; ease; safety; "peacefully" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Genesis 26 bridges the patriarchal narratives from Abraham to his son, Isaac. Beginning with chapter 12, Abraham is the central character until his death in Genesis 25, where Isaac inherited God's promises in the Abrahamic covenant. Chapter 26 begins by describing the consequences of a famine in the land and God's instructions to Isaac to remain in Gerar. This chapter also provides a multigenerational snapshot of Isaac's family because many of the challenges he faced mirror those of his father, Abraham. Both men were challenged by famines and forced to relocate temporarily: Abraham to Egypt (see Genesis 12:10) and Isaac to Gerar (see Genesis 26:1). They were also guilty of deceiving foreign rulers about their wives because they feared for their lives, claiming them to be their sisters (see Genesis 12:11-20; 20:1-18; 26:7). Locating and maintaining wells as water sources among neighboring people were also shared experiences that led to similar conflicts and contention (see Genesis 21:25; 26:15-22). Still more significant was their similar spiritual experiences in their relationship with God. In a unilateral and unconditional covenant, God promised Abraham land, numerous descendants, and blessings—a covenant he repeated and confirmed with Isaac. Yet, the pivotal parallel between Abraham's and Isaac's shared experiences is the multigenerational legacy of faith and obedience passed down to future generations.

Introduction

Multigenerational families are households including two or more adult generations (with adults mainly ages 25 or older). In these homes there may be small children along with retirement-aged adults. Multigenerational household numbers have steadily increased since the 1970s after a short period in which nuclear households were the norm. One of the advantages of this kind of environment is learning about one's family history as stories are told and interesting facts are revealed about ancestors. We can also discover similar behavior patterns, personality traits, body types, and physical features. However, one of the most significant things we can learn in a multigenerational environment is the rich spiritual legacies passed from generation to generation. These rich spiritual traditions have shaped our lives and shaped our faith, offering an invaluable perspective that continues to influence us across generations. A significant example of this benefit is revealed in Abraham's son Isaac's life experiences recorded in Genesis 26, the only chapter in Scripture in which he is the main character. We get a glimpse of the trials and struggles he faced, but more importantly, God reaffirms the multigenerational covenant made with his father, Abraham, promising to bless him and his descendants.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Reassurance (*Genesis 26:24-25*)

KJV

24 And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy

father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

24 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.”

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.

After Isaac settled in the valley of Gerar, disputes arose between his servants and herdsmen in that area over wells dug to water his herds and flocks until he finally relocated to Beersheba (see verses 18-23). Here, God appeared to Isaac on the same night of his arrival. God’s conversation with Isaac is similar to His words at the beginning of this chapter (see verses 2-5). God introduced Himself to Isaac as his father’s (Abraham’s) God (**verse 24**). Although Isaac knew *about* God at this time in his life, he apparently didn’t *know* Him as intimately as Abraham did, nor was he acutely aware of the role he was to play in God’s plans for him and his future descendants. By identifying Himself as his father’s God, God reaffirmed that the covenant promises He made with Abraham would continue through Isaac, thus linking his future with them and God’s commitment to fulfill them.

Further, God commanded Isaac to “fear not,” assuring him of His protective presence. Isaac showed fear when he lied about his relationship with Rebekah and demonstrated passiveness when he refused to retaliate when Gerar’s herders challenged his use of wells in the area. Isaac needed a reminder that trusting God meant depending on Him more and fearing people less. Isaac did, however, have evidence of God’s power because of the prosperity he enjoyed – resulting from his obedience and God’s subsequent blessings (see Genesis 26:12-14). God also assured that He would bless him and multiply his descendants because of His faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant, confirming that he was now its beneficiary.

Consequently, Isaac responded like his father by building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord (**verse 25**). In this context, this act signified Isaac’s solidifying the covenant establishing a personal relationship with God—symbolizing devotion, gratitude for His blessings, and commitment to serving Him, and accepting his patriarchal role as his family’s worship leader. Isaac needed to get to know God for himself, and so do we by discovering who He is in His Word and then applying its principles to our lives. We also need periodic reassurance of His presence and can receive it as we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. Finally, we must not forget to worship Him out of gratitude for His blessings and faithfulness to His promises to us.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How do God’s promises to Isaac reflect the importance of establishing multi-generational faith legacies?

Reconciliation (Genesis 26:26-33)

KJV

26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phicol the chief captain of his army.

27 And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?

28 And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee;

29 That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD.

30 And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.

31 And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

32 And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water.

33 And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

NIV

26 Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces.

27 Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

28 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

29 "that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD."

30 Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank.

31 Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

32 That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!"

33 He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

Sometime after God reaffirmed His covenant with Isaac and his relocating to Beersheba, Isaac received a visit from Abimelech (his adviser), Ahuzzath, and Phicol, the commander of his army (**verse 26**). Isaac's initial response reflects his suspicion concerning the purpose of this unannounced visit because of previous negative interactions with him and his people (**verse 27**). Isaac's prosperity and abundant flocks and herds led to Abimelech's deporting him from the area of Gerar—leaving Isaac to assume that he hated him. Additionally, people in the area

consistently harassed Isaac and his servants over wells being dug. However, Abimelech revealed that the purpose of his visit was to establish an agreement of peace between them, motivated by his realization that Isaac enjoyed God's presence, power, and provision (**verse 28**). The primary stipulation in this requested peace pact was that Isaac would not harm him just as he and his people had not physically harmed Isaac and sent him away peacefully (**verse 29**). We can assume that Abimelech recognized the power of Isaac's God and desired to be at peace with Him.

Isaac agreed to Abimelech's request for peace and prepared a feast for him and his companions, swore an oath to abide by it, sent them away in peace the following morning, and received good news from his servants that they found water in the well they dug in the area (**verses 30-32**). To commemorate the discovery of the well, Isaac named it Shibah, which means "oath" in Hebrew (**verse 33**). The peace agreement and discovery of the well reaffirmed to Isaac that God's promises are true. This event underscores the significance of multigenerational lineage in God's relationship with those He chooses to use in His plans. Abraham, Isaac's father, made a treaty with another Abimelech concerning a well in Beersheba, symbolizing his right to the land. Likewise, Isaac's treaty reaffirmed the promised blessings regarding the land and, more importantly, their continuation through Isaac. Three spiritual principles emerge from this event that believers can apply to their lives: (1) being where God wants you and being in His will guarantee His protection, power, and presence; (2) God's faithfulness to His promises is unhindered by external opposition and our fears and failures when we are in a right relationship with Him; and (3) passing down a godly heritage from generation to generation must become a priority for the faith community to ensure their spiritual growth and effectiveness in fulfilling God's plans for its mission in the world.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can we demonstrate God's being with us so that others are drawn to Him and into the faith community (see Genesis 26:28a, 29b)?

A Closing Thought

Isaac's experience in Genesis 26 underscores the significance of two essential spiritual principles. One is developing and maintaining one's intimate relationship with God—figuratively speaking, "digging your own well" of faith in God. Isaac knew about God; but it wasn't until God spoke to him and affirmed His presence, power, and provision about where He wanted him to be that Isaac built an altar, worshipped, and publicly proclaimed Him to be his God. Second, this narrative underscores the significance of multigenerational family heritages that pass down faith legacies, as illustrated by Isaac's receiving God's blessings and promises to his father, Abraham. Hence, our generation must take seriously the urgent need to create and pass on the principles of our faith to those following us, so that they can "dig" their wells of faith in Christ.

Your Life

Isaac received the blessing of God's promises because he was Abraham's descendant, who taught him by precept and example about his faith in God. Abraham passed his legacy of faith to Isaac, enabling him to cultivate his own. This week, make time to reflect on what you received from your ancestors regarding their faith in God. What lessons should you have learned from how they faced adversity and how they demonstrated their faith through works of righteousness despite unfavorable circumstances? Then, consider what you can do to fulfill your responsibilities to pass on a vibrant faith heritage to the next generation.

Your World!

When we consider the continuous exiting and falling away of the GenZ and the Millennial generations from the church, we must seriously rethink older generations' responsibility regarding the type of faith legacies that have been passed to them. The essential task is being living examples that demonstrate confident faith in God as vital to a relationship with Him, thus equipping and enabling them to develop and maintain their own in the days ahead.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we acknowledge our responsibility to pass on a legacy of faith to those following us and help them "dig their faith wells" in You. We pray for spiritual insight and the courage to be living examples of faith to pass on to others for Your glory and for their good. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Consider your response to this question as you prepare for next week's lesson: "How can I commemorate significant spiritual events in my life that will glorify God and impact others' worship?" Read Genesis 28:10-22.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, June 23	"Purify Yourself before God"	(Genesis 35:1-7)
TUESDAY, June 24	"Abide in Christ, the True Vine"	(John 15:1-8)
WEDNESDAY, June 25	"Seek God with All Your Heart"	(Jeremiah 29:8-14)
THURSDAY, June 26	"Christ Is among His Gathered People"	(Matthew 18:15-20)
FRIDAY, June 27	"Christ Is with Us Always"	(Matthew 28:16-20)
SATURDAY, June 28	"Fullness of Joy in God's Presence"	(Psalm 16)
SUNDAY, June 29	"The Lord Is in This Place"	(Genesis 28:10-22)