

# Genesis – Lesson 21

## The Story of Isaac

### Read Genesis 26:1-11.

1. (a) What *similarities* do you find between these events and the events of Abraham's life? Why do these stories *mirror* each other so closely?

The parallels between this event and what happened to Abram and Sarai are remarkable: 1) in both cases, an event is precipitated by a *famine*; 2) Isaac is warned by God to remain in Canaan; 3) both men were connected to the land of Gerar and Abimelech its king; 4) God makes promises to both men of the same things (see 1b below); 5) both men excuse their wife as their sister to protect themselves; 6) in both cases, Abimelech has to rebuke the man for failing to identify his wife which brings God's wrath; 7) in both cases, the men had to contend with the natives over water rights; and 8) in both cases, the men eventually make a covenant with Abimelech. The stories are so similar because the work of God is *continuing* through Isaac from Abraham; God is *orchestrating* a similar path for Isaac in order to demonstrate that his promises to Abraham are continuing through Isaac (see 1b below).

(b) When God appeared to Isaac at Gerar (vv. 2-5), what *assurances* did he give to Isaac? Which do you think was the *greatest* assurance?

God's assurances included 1) the land, 2) numerous offspring, and 3) the blessing of all the nations of the earth through him. The greatest assurance was probably the last; Isaac would never possess this land directly, nor would he live to see the numerous offspring that would come from him, but he would have the *ultimate* assurance that God was going to work through him to bless the world, fulfilling the promise of a *redeemer* through his line.

(c) Why did God *repeat* the promises he had already given to Abraham?

The repetition of these promises to Isaac *affirms* that God's word continues even though Abraham is gone; Isaac needed to be reminded by God that the promises still stood, and the God was continuing to move his family towards its destiny. This is true of each generation: God repeats his promises (through his Word) to each successive generation so that the promises are never lost, and each subsequent generation can be assured as was the previous that God is still doing all that he has said he would.

(d) How are these assurances *similar* to the one that Jesus gave to his disciples in the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:18-20)? How does it *help* us?

Jesus assures his followers that their work of making disciples of all nations would not be done through *their* abilities or strength, but through the *abiding presence* of Christ in the world. The work of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Son from the Father, would advance the cause of Christ *through* believers. Thus, the Great Commission is *actually* the work of God through those he indwells by his Spirit. Therefore, we need not be worried about how to complete this work, but simply to offer ourselves to be used in obedience to this commission.

### Read Genesis 26:12-22.

2. (a) What does v. 12 tell you about the *way* God was dealing with Isaac? Why was this so *unusual*?

God was granting to Isaac great physical prosperity (just as he did with Abraham). The purpose of this prosperity was to make the natives *afraid* of Isaac; this prosperity allowed Isaac (like Abraham) to build a great status and protect him while he was living in this place. It was *unusual* because it seems counter-intuitive; the warnings concerning wealth and what it does to our relationship with God seem to be ignored here. Isaac is prospered by God, even though such things can lead to a broken fellowship with him. God was *protecting* Isaac *both* physically (from the neighbors) and spiritually (from moral bankruptcy).

(b) What *two* ways did the Philistines react to Isaac? *Why* did they do this? How did Isaac *deal* with their response? How did God *reward* him for it?

After Abraham's death, the Philistines filled all of Abraham's wells in the area. Then, as Isaac began to reopen them, they contended with Isaac for their possession. They did this out of *envy* (note v. 14); they were jealous of the great wealth that Isaac had, and they tried to drive him out of the area. Isaac responded with *patience*; he continued to dig new wells until he found a place they would not contend for. God rewarded him by granting him *peace* with his neighbors.

3. From Romans 2:6-8, what *lesson* can we learn from Isaac's reaction to the Philistines?

Isaac worked *patiently* towards the place of peace; he persevered under attack until he reached a place where his enemies either became tired of chasing him or where he had reached a spot they didn't care about. The lesson for believers is *patience*: the Christian life is to be one of perpetual endurance and patience. We will not become *instantaneously* holy, nor will we be able to overcome sin immediately. Instead, we must work, day after day, to pursue righteousness; when we stumble, we must repent and continue on working towards the perfection of Christ in us. Those who truly persevere in righteousness, and do not fall back (permanently) into unrighteousness and sinfulness, will find peace at the end.

### Read Genesis 26:23-33.

4. (a) Why do you think that God *encouraged* Isaac with the phrase "fear not?" (v. 24)

There are several possible reasons why God encourages Isaac not to fear: 1) Isaac has been struggling with the Philistines, and they are deeply troubling to him, but God assures him that he will not need to worry about them further, 2) Isaac may not be sure that the promises of God made to Abraham will apply to him, so God assures him that they do, or 3) the appearance of God *directly* to Isaac may have frightened him, given the holiness of God, so God assures him that he is safe, even in the presence of such holiness.

(b) What does the altar that Isaac built *represent*? According to Hebrews 13:10-13, what is the altar that *believers* worship before?

The altar represents either: 1) a place of *sacrifice*, where offering to God is made for sin, thus an admission of unholiness and the need for mercy, or 2) a place of *permanence*, where Isaac could look as the place where he met God and was embraced by him. The altar for Christians is the *cross*, the place where Jesus was offered up to the Father outside the city. It is similar in nature to Isaac's altar: it is a place of sacrifice, where Jesus is offered up to God for sin, and it is a place of permanence, where we can meet God and be embraced by him as his own.

5. How does Genesis 26:26-33 *prove* the truth of Proverbs 16:7? How do we do this today?

Proverbs 16:7 indicates that those who serve the Lord in obedience, in ways that are pleasing to him, are rewarded by making even their enemies to be at peace with them. Isaac patiently served the Lord, looking for ways to do what God required of him, and it was *noticed* by Abimelech (and the Philistines) who came to him to sue for peace. We do this today by quietly going about the work of serving God and doing good towards others; our benevolence towards others pushes even the most staunch enemy of God away from anger towards us. This does not imply that *every* enemy will be at peace with us, but it does imply that it is *better* to work for peace with others than to try and *force* confrontation when unnecessary.

6. (a) Looking back over chapters 22 through 26, list as many *character attributes* that you can about Isaac from these events (see 22:9; 24:62; 24:66-67; 25:9; 26:6; 26:17-22; 26:30-31).

Isaac was 1) submissive to his father; 2) obedient to God; 3) loving towards his wife; 4) loving towards his brother; 5) willing to remain faithful to his father and to God; 6) patient towards others, even his enemies; and 7) willing to make a covenant relationship with those he struggled with.

(b) How do these various attributes *foreshadow* the character of Jesus?

**Isaac's character is, in many ways, a *foreshadowing* of Jesus Christ. Just as Isaac was submissive to his father and willing to be sacrificed, so Jesus gave himself to his Father. Just as Isaac was loving towards his family, Jesus draws to himself and loves a family of his own. Just as Isaac was patient with the faults of others, Jesus is patience with those he has given himself for. And, just as Isaac was willing to establish a covenant of peace with his enemies, so Jesus comes to establish a covenant of peace between his Father and those who have turned from being God's enemies.**