

The Life & Times of Isaac

GENESIS 26:1-33

Opening Thoughts

- * This is the only chapter devoted to Isaac ... with his recorded life, in many ways, a [recapitulation](#) of Abraham's life
 - ◆ Reminding us that the ways of man doesn't change ... nor do the ways of God!
- * He seems a man wedged into the story between Abraham and Jacob
- * As one commentator says ...
- * Isaac is the [ordinary son](#) of a great father, and the [ordinary father](#) of a great son.

Opening Thoughts

- * Yet, he is no less a patriarch ... just less prominent
 - ◆ As we will be in the millennium ... none less saved, but some with greater and some with lesser roles "in the Kingdom of God" 😊
- * Gen 25:19-34 is chronologically "prospective" ... and Gen 26 is chronologically "retrospective"
 - ◆ In other words, the events of Gen 25:19ff look ahead and occur before the events of Gen 26, which looks back ...
- * The inverted order conveys "authorial" emphasis

Opening Thoughts

- * How can we prove this chronological assertion?
 - ◆ Because if they already had the kids, the events of Gen 26:6-9 would make no sense
- * So why this order?
 - ◆ To introduce Jacob & prepare us for what follows in Gen 27
 - ◆ Poor Isaac seems primarily to be a "footnote" acting as a bridge from Abraham to Jacob
 - ◆ But we don't feel too bad for him — he lived the longest and we learned what God wanted us to know about Isaac in Abraham's narrative ... i.e. His patient faithfulness

Structure of the Narrative

- * Six vignettes of Isaac's life — vv. 1-33
 - ◆ Covenant reaffirmation ... Part 1 — vv. 1-5
 - ◆ Like father, like son — vv. 6-11
 - ◆ God blesses Isaac — vv. 12-14
 - ◆ Trouble with the "locals" — vv. 15-22
 - ◆ Covenant reaffirmation ... Part 2 — vv. 23-25
 - ◆ Peace in the land — vv. 26-33
- * Esau's fateful marriages — vv. 34-35

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * The focus of vv. 1-5 is covenant reaffirmation
- * Verse 1 "sets the table" for vv. 2-4
 - ◆ A summary statement of the situation ... famine in the land and Isaac is sojourning for food
 - ◆ This is not the same Abimelech - almost 80 years have passed since the "Abraham" famine ...
 - The name "Abimelech" was a title for the Philistine kings
- * In vv. 2-4, God appears to Isaac the 1st of 2x's
 - ◆ God commands Isaac to stay in the land ... NO Egypt (v. 2)

Covenant Reaffirmation

- ◆ And then reaffirms covenant blessings (v. 3a) and covenant promises (vv. 3b-4)
 - The “oath” is a reference to Gen 22:16ff ... interesting statement as Isaac would have heard this at Mt. Moriah
 - The “third” instance of זרע (seed, descendant) in vv. 3-4 is likely best translated in the singular ... with reference to THE SEED who will bless all the nations
- * We remember from Abraham ...
 - ◆ That covenant promises will **unilaterally** endure, while the fullest enjoyment of covenant blessings are **conditioned upon obedience**

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * And then this enigmatic reason for the reaffirmation in v. 5 ... **What is going on?**
 - ◆ Abraham did not have the law, or the commandments, or the statutes ... but he did keep **God's charge**
 - ◆ Abraham believed and was declared righteous (Gen 15:6) ... AND he demonstrated the “**obedience of faith**”
 - ◆ **FAITH INTUITIVELY OBEYS** ... with or w/o the law - Rom 2:14-15
 - ◆ Also some suggestion of imputation — Abraham's obedience
 - ◆ And as Paul ably notes in Gal 3:15ff law and promise are not in conflict with one another

Like Father, Like Son

- * At the outset, it is interesting to note ...
 - ◆ How quickly sin follows on the “heels” of blessing
 - ◆ Can you think of a recent NT example?
 - ▶ How about Peter in Matt 16:13-23!
- * Isaac calls a play from his father’s play-book though a “tish” more egregious ... Why?
 - ◆ Sarah was a half-sister, Rebekah is his cousin
 - ▶ Which is where we get “kissin’ cousins,” ... I guess
 - ◆ AND — because Isaac had seen how God protected Abraham

Like Father, Like Son

- 📖 Reminding us that sin is just not logical!
- * Isaac’s fears don’t materialize, yet he persists in the deception
- * Why should Isaac have changed course by now?
 - ◆ Note v. 8 ... he’d been in Gerar a long time and nothing had happened!
- * Well — Abimelech catches Isaac in the act of “sporting” with Rebekah (word play - participle of the verb “to laugh”)

Like Father, Like Son

- * And **summons** him to the palace for a chat- v. 9
 - ◆ Summons is better translation than “called”
- * **What’s wrong with Isaac’s response?**
 - ◆ Like his father ...
 - He has assumed the worse without cause
 - He has exposed Rebekah & the seed line
 - He has acted in a cowardly manner
 - He has no apparent contrition

Like Father, Like Son

- * Abimelech delivers a well-deserved “tongue lashing”
- * **But what is interesting about his further actions?**
 - ◆ He has a measure of integrity absent in Isaac
 - Perhaps a carry-over from his father’s interactions with Abraham ...
 - ◆ Nevertheless, he recognizes adultery as wrong (i.e. guilt)
- * Ironically, the pagan king seems to have a better sense of morality than God’s chosen vehicle, and ...
- * He acts to uphold that morality — issuing a protective order over Isaac and Rebekah - v. 11

God Blesses Isaac

- * As with his father, despite his failures God bestows divine favor on Isaac
 - ◆ A stupendous crop — 100-fold
 - ◆ And riches upon riches ... God added to the considerable possessions Isaac already inherited from Abraham
- * He was so rich as to attract the envy of his neighbors ... leading to inevitable strife

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * Having stirred up their envy, the “locals” start to cause trouble ... striking where it hurts - v. 15
 - ◆ To a “herdsman” — cutting off the water supply would be a big problem
- * This led to a formal request from the government to leave the country - v. 16
- * What's interesting about Isaac's reply?
 - ◆ He yields and leaves despite “having the power” to resist
- * What NT biblical quality does he demonstrate?
 - ◆ MEEKNESS ... power under control

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * But he doesn't go far ... he settles in the valley of Gerar
 - ◆ So — he's still on their turf, just moved out of the city proper to the “burbs” ...
- * Where a series of conflicts over wells follows in vv. 18-20
- * What's going on ... other than the obvious ... in these verses?
 - ◆ God is trying to get the prodigal back HOME
 - ◆ He wants Isaac “back in the land” ...
 - ◆ So he uses the conflict to keep Isaac moving in the right direction

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * After several attempts, God finally has Isaac where he wants him and the opposition ceases - v. 22
- * Recognizing God's providence, Isaac acknowledges that “God” has made room for he and his flocks naming the place Rehoboth
 - ◆ The place name and the verb “has made room” is a word-play arising from the same Hebrew root ...
 - ◆ רחב - to make large, wide

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * Having settled his herdsmen, Isaac moves on to Beersheba - v. 23
 - ◆ Where-upon Yahweh makes his 2nd appearance to Isaac
- * Yahweh indicates his approval of Isaac's actions by "immediately" appearing to bless him
- * What is the substance of Yahweh's blessing?
 - ◆ Have no fear ... FOR, I am with Abraham "now," and I am with you also

Covenant Reaffirmation

- ◆ Blessings and many descendants reaffirmed
- * What is the basis of Yahweh's blessing?
 - ◆ His original promises to Abraham ... signaling Covenant continuity
- * And like his father, Isaac responds with worship
 - ◆ An altar, his tent, and a well

Peace in the Land

- * The final vignette again parallels Abraham's final interaction with the former Abimelech
- * Like their fathers before them, both men recognize the value of "peaceful co-existence"
- * Abimelech approaches Isaac with his retinue ... and Isaac is puzzled by, or "toying with," their coming
 - ◆ Why are you here ... you kicked me out?
 - ◆ At a minimum, Isaac is establishing their "ill-will" toward him
- * Abimelech expresses the same motivation as his father had ... because God is with you

Peace in the Land

- * What is disingenuous about Abimelech's response?
 - ◆ He ignores what he must have known of their "harassing" Isaac out of their territory ...
 - ◆ Which in fairness he may not have entirely known
 - ◆ But is more likely "diplomatic license" ... AKA putting his best "spin" on the matter to achieve his goal

Peace in the Land

- * Isaac ... the meek ... responds by “not responding”
 - ◆ Seeing no value in needless quarreling, Isaac shows restraint by not disputing Abimelech's oversight ...
 - ◆ Which is fully consistent with his “retreat” to Rehoboth
- * Instead, Isaac signals his agreement by preparing a “covenant-feast” ...
- * Followed by formal ratification and bidding them farewell the next morning

Peace in the Land

- * Shortly thereafter ... perhaps as a sign of God's providence ... Abraham's servants “strike water”
 - ◆ Prompting Isaac to memorialize the place with the name “Shibah” ... perhaps remembering the location's prior significance
 - ◆ Same root (שׁבַע) as Gen 21:30 ... different “vowels”
- * Regardless of reason, the place is perpetually known as Beersheba

Esau's Fateful Marriages

- * Vv. 34-35 turn our attention back to family matters
- * Before moving on, we get a final expression of Esau's character ... and a point of context for a future event (Gen 27:46)
- * Namely, he eschews all concern for his "spiritual heritage" by taking two Hittite women for wives
- * Resulting in grief ... literally "bitterness of spirit" ... to Isaac and Rebekah
 - ◆ Reminding us that some kids are harder to shepherd than others ... but weakness only results in later grief

Isaac's Interment

- * From here on, the story centers on the exploits of Jacob
- * Only to return to Isaac in Gen 35:28-29 to record his death
 - ◆ Interestingly, Rebekah's death is never recorded
- * Isaac lived to 180 years old ...
 - ◆ Though through some "dating gymnastics," his actual death was 12-13 years hence of v. 28-29 — it is "proleptic"
 - ◆ The point is to mark the full transition to Jacob
- * And he was buried by his two sons Esau and Jacob ... signaling reconciliation between the brothers — which will make sense to you after next week's lesson

Closing Thoughts

- * Isaac succeeds and fails in the same **fashion** as his father
 - ◆ Reminding us parents and grandparents ... that the kids are watching
- * God was intent upon returning Isaac to the land ...
 - ◆ What is it taking God to get you home?
- * Though Isaac was imperfect ... He was still God's man
 - ◆ God was not ashamed to be his God — Heb 11:16, and ...
 - ◆ God used Isaac to pass on the covenant promises — Heb 11:20
- * Reminding and reassuring us that God can work with broken and imperfect vessels
