

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 26

THROUGH THE LAST FEW CHAPTERS OF GENESIS, THE STORY OF ABRAHAM AND GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIM HAS SHIFTED ITS CENTRAL FOCUS. BOTH SARAH AND ABRAHAM HAVE DIED AND ISAAC THEIR SON BECOMES THE MAIN CHARACTER IN OUR REDEMPTION STORY. HE IS NOW MARRIED (TO REBEKAH) WITH TWIN SONS (ESAU AND JACOB). WE WILL NOW WALK WITH ISAAC THROUGH HIS LEG OF THIS JOURNEY. WE WILL OBSERVE THAT ISAAC IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE SON OF ABRAHAM - IN FAITH AND IN FLAWS. OUR STORY BEGINS IN GENESIS 26 SIMILAR TO ABRAHAM'S STORY IN GENESIS 12 - A WIDESPREAD FAMINE FORCES THE FAMILY TO MOVE.

GENESIS 26:1-5 - THE PROMISE CONTINUES

ISAAC GOES TO GERAR IN THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES, WHICH IS RULED BY KING ABIMELECH. IT'S LIKELY THAT ABIMELECH WAS A ROYAL TITLE OF THE PHILISTINE KINGS (ABI-MELECH MEANS "MY FATHER THE KING" IN HEBREW) RATHER THAN THE SAME KING ABRAHAM DEALT WITH YEARS BEFORE. OR PERHAPS IT IS THE SAME GUY JUST MUCH OLDER. THOSE DETAILS DON'T CHANGE THE STORY.

GENESIS 26 OPENS UP BY CONNECTING US BACK IN PART TO THE STORY OF ABRAHAM. GENESIS 12:10 TOLD US THAT A "FAMINE IN THE LAND" LEADS ABRAHAM AND SARAH TO SOJOURN IN EGYPT. GENESIS 26:1 INFORMS US THAT A NEW "FAMINE IN THE LAND" OCCURS WHICH MOVES ISAAC TO GERAR (AS OPPOSED TO EGYPT). IT IS IN THIS MOMENT OF UNCERTAINTY THAT THE LORD VISITS ISAAC AND CONFIRMS HIS COVENANT PROMISE TO HIM.

THE LORD TELLS ISAAC TO REMAIN IN GERAR, WHICH IS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN. HE WILL SOJOURN THERE AS HIS FATHER ABRAHAM DID. THE LORD PROMISES TO BE WITH ISAAC AND PROVIDE FOR/BLESS HIM, CERTAINLY A WELCOMED PROMISE IN THE DAYS OF FAMINE. THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM BECOMES THE BLESSING OF ISAAC TOO.

THIS IS AN INTERESTING INTERACTION BECAUSE GOD TRANSFERS THE COVENANT PROMISE OF ABRAHAM TO ISAAC AS WELL, AS OPPOSED TO JUST SAYING ISAAC WILL BE AN HEIR OF THESE BLESSINGS BECAUSE OF ABRAHAM. IN THIS WAY, THERE IS ESTABLISHED A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THIS PROMISE RATHER THAN JUST A LEGAL OR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION AS ABRAHAM'S SON. THE LORD CONCLUDES THIS BLESSING BY REMINDING ISAAC THAT ABRAHAM WAS HEIR TO THIS PROMISE BECAUSE HE "OBEYED ME AND KEPT MY CHARGE, COMMANDMENTS, STATUTES AND LAWS (GENESIS 26:5)." WE KNOW FROM THE ABRAHAMIC STORY ITSELF THAT IT WAS THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM THAT IMPRESSED THE LORD. HERE THE FAITHFULNESS OF ABRAHAM IS WHAT IS HIGHLIGHTED. AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED PREVIOUSLY, ONE CANNOT SEPARATE "FAITH IN GOD" FROM "FAITHFULNESS TO GOD".

GENESIS 26:6-11 - ISAAC & REBEKAH IN GERAR

FAMINE COMES. ISAAC SOJOURNS IN A LAND WITH CONCERN FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE. ISAAC LIES ABOUT HIS WIFE, SAYING SHE IS HIS SISTER. RESIDENTS OF THE LAND FIND OUT HE IS LYING AND GET ANGRY. SOUND FAMILIAR? THIS IS NEARLY THE IDENTICAL STORY TO WHAT ABRAHAM AND SARAH ENCOUNTERED WHEN THEY WENT TO EGYPT BECAUSE OF THE FAMINE (GENESIS 12). ACTUALLY ABRAHAM DID THIS TWICE! (THE SECOND TIME WAS IN THIS SAME REGION! SEE GENESIS 20).

THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO PAUSE AND CONSIDER THE "WHY" OF ISAAC'S ACTIONS. ISAAC IS NERVOUS FOR HIS LIFE AND FOR HIS WIFE AND SO HE LIES TO PROTECT HIMSELF. YET, EVENTUALLY HIS LIE IS DISCOVERED AND HE GETS CAUGHT. THIS IS A GREAT WINDOW INTO THE HUMAN CONDITION. WHY DOES ISAAC DO THIS? BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HIS DAD DID. ISAAC WASN'T EVEN BORN WHEN ABRAHAM DID A SIMILAR THING WITH HIS WIFE - BUT BOTH BY BIOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT, WE LEARN HOW TO LIVE FROM OUR PARENTS - RIGHT OR WRONG, GOOD AND BAD.

WE LEARN HOW TO DEAL WITH LIFE FROM OUR PARENTS AND FAMILY OF ORIGIN. ISAAC, UNDER PRESSURE, FEARING FOR HIS LIFE (AND HIS WIFE), HAS LEARNED FROM HIS FATHER THAT DECEIT CAN GET YOU OUT OF TROUBLE. AND SO WHEN HE IS PRESSED, HE LIES, BECAUSE HE (WRONGLY) BELIEVES THAT'S THE EASY WAY OUT. THERE IS NO CONSIDERATION THAT GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF HIM IF HE DOES THE RIGHT THING - INSTEAD HE HAS LEARNED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS AND THAT BY HIS DECISIONS AND CHOICES HE CAN ESCAPE PAIN, TROUBLE OR DIFFICULTY.

HOW OUR FAMILIES DEAL WITH LIFE IS PASSED DOWN TO US, OFTEN WITHOUT US EVEN NOTICING. EVEN AS CHRISTIANS, WE HAVE GENERATIONAL TENDENCIES THAT WE MUST CONSIDER DEEPLY IN LIGHT OF OUR DESIRE TO FOLLOW JESUS. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT AS CHRISTIANS, "JESUS MIGHT BE IN YOUR HEART, BUT GRANDPA IS IN YOUR BONES". HOW DID YOUR PARENTS DEAL WITH CONFLICT? YELLING AT EACH OTHER, PERSONALLY AND VERBALLY ATTACKING EACH OTHER? SILENT TREATMENT AND STONEWALLING? LISTENING AND FORGIVING? HOW DID YOUR FAMILY DEAL WITH PRESSURES? DRINKING ALCOHOL? EATING? SMOKING MARIJUANA? PRAYER MEETINGS? HOW DID YOUR FAMILY DEAL WITH FINANCIAL CHALLENGES? CREDIT CARD DEBT? STEALING? TITHING? DID YOUR FAMILY HAVE HIGH ANXIETY LEVELS? WERE THEY GOOD AT COMMUNICATING HOW THEY FELT? DID THEY WORK TOO MUCH? WERE THEY LAZY? WERE THEY OVERLY CONCERNED HOW MATERIAL THINGS? WERE THEY OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT OR HOW THEY LOOKED IN THE EYES OF OTHER PEOPLE? DID THEY HAVE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ON EACH OTHER?

IT IS HEALTHY AND GOOD AND WISE TO CONSIDER OUR FAMILY HISTORY. YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL ARE NOT IMMUNE NOR ARE YOU EXEMPT FROM THIS PATTERN. UNLESS WE ARE EACH INTENTIONAL TO THINK AND PRAY AND TALK ABOUT THESE THINGS, WE WILL FIND OURSELVES, OFTEN UNKNOWINGLY, LIVING LIFE JUST LIKE OUR FAMILIES DID.

IN SOME CASES THE THINGS OUR FAMILIES DID AND HOW THEY LIVED LIFE ARE COMPATIBLE WITH FOLLOWING JESUS (GRANDMA WAS A SWEETHEART AND THAT'S HELPED YOU BE A SWEETHEART). BUT CERTAINLY THIS IS NOT TRUE ABOUT ALL THEY DID OR DO.

ISAAC DID THE *SAME EXACT THING* THAT ABRAHAM DID. THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN HIS HEART BUT THE ABRAHAMIC FLAWS WERE IN HIS BONES.

GENESIS 26:12-17 - ISAAC LIVES IN PHILISTIA

GOD DOES INDEED TAKE CARE OF ISAAC WHILE HE LIVES IN GERAR - IN SPITE OF THE FAMINE (AND HIS FAMILIAL FAILINGS). BUT THIS LEADS TO TROUBLE WITH HIS NEIGHBORS WHO ARE LIKELY STRUGGLING IN THOSE SAME CONDITIONS. THE PHILISTINES HAD STOPPED UP THE WELLS THAT ABRAHAM HAD DUG YEARS BEFORE. IN A FAMINE, WELL WATER WOULD HAVE BEEN ESSENTIAL.

AS WE CONSIDER THE STORY OF THE QUARREL OF THE WELLS, WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THERE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A TREATY BETWEEN THE FORMER ABIMELECH & ABRAHAM'S FAMILY (21:22-24)

GENESIS 21:22-24 22 ABOUT THIS TIME, ABIMELECH CAME...TO VISIT ABRAHAM. "GOD IS OBVIOUSLY WITH YOU, HELPING YOU IN EVERYTHING YOU DO," ABIMELECH SAID. 23 "SWEAR TO ME IN GOD'S NAME THAT YOU WILL NEVER DECEIVE ME, MY CHILDREN, OR ANY OF MY DESCENDANTS. I HAVE BEEN LOYAL TO YOU, SO NOW SWEAR THAT YOU WILL BE LOYAL TO ME AND TO THIS COUNTRY WHERE YOU ARE LIVING AS A FOREIGNER." 24 ABRAHAM REPLIED, "YES, I SWEAR TO IT!"

ISAAC HADN'T KEPT HIS FAMILIES END OF THE BARGAIN, AND NEITHER HAD ABIMELECH'S BOYS. ABIMELECH TELLS ISAAC TO "GO AWAY."

GENESIS 26:18-22 - QUARRELLING OVER THE WELLS

ISAAC LEAVES PER ABIMELECH'S REQUEST BUT THIS DOESN'T STOP THE QUARREL. ISAAC REOPENS ONE OF ABRAHAM'S OLD WELLS AND FINDS A GOOD WATER SOURCE. THE PEOPLE OF GERAR HEAR THIS AND AREN'T HAPPY. THIS HAPPENS A FEW TIMES AND FINALLY ISAAC MOVES AWAY TO A PLACE HE NAMES "REHOBOTH"

"THE NAME *REHOBOTH* (רְהוֹבוֹת, *REHOVOT*) IS DERIVED FROM A VERBAL ROOT MEANING "TO MAKE ROOM." THE NAME WAS A REMINDER THAT GOD HAD MADE ROOM FOR THEM. THE STORY SHOWS ISAAC'S PATIENCE WITH THE OPPOSITION; IT ALSO SHOWS HOW GOD'S BLESSING OUTDISTANCED THE MEN OF GERAR. THEY COULD NOT STOP IT OR SEIZE IT ANY LONGER." (NET BIBLE NOTE, GENESIS 26:22)

(SIDE NOTE: REHOBOTH, MA, ESTABLISHED IN 1643, WAS NAMED FOR THE SAME REASON - IT WAS A BROAD PLACE FOR ITS FIRST RESIDENTS TO SETTLE.)

THIS SECTION HIGHLIGHTS THE *SOJOURNER* STATUS OF ISAAC. HE HAS NO PERMANENT RESIDENCY, HE'S MOVING AROUND FROM PLACE TO PLACE AND HE'S TRYING TO SETTLE SOMEWHERE TO LIVE LIFE.

GENESIS 26:23-25

ISAAC AND HIS FAMILY ARE MOVING AROUND, TROUBLE WAITS FOR THEM AT EACH PIT STOP IT SEEMS, PUSHING THEM TO MOVE AGAIN.

AND THEN HE HEADS TO BEERSHEBA, WHERE THE LORD MEETS WITH HIM AND EVERYTHING CHANGES - EVEN THOUGH NOTHING AROUND ISAAC ACTUALLY CHANGES. THE LORD DECLARES TO ISAAC "DO NOT FEAR, I AM WITH YOU" - PERHAPS SOME OF THE SWEETEST WORDS OF SCRIPTURE! GOD REAFFIRMS TO ISAAC HIS FAVOR AND BLESSING - ALL FOR THE SAKE OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC'S FATHER.

THIS PROMISE LEADS TO ISAAC "BUILDING AN ALTAR AND CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD" (WORSHIP) AND THE PITCHING OF THEIR TENTS. IN OTHER WORDS, ISAAC ISN'T GOING TO BOUNCE AROUND FOR A WHILE NOW, FOR THE LORD IS WITH HIM. THANKFULLY THIS INSPIRING CHARACTERISTIC TO WORSHIP THE LORD WAS ONE OF THE GOOD THINGS HE LEARNED FROM HIS FATHER.

GENESIS 26:26-33 - ABRAHAM-ABIMELECH OATH RENEWED

AS THE CHAPTER NEARS ITS CLOSE, ANOTHER PART OF THE ABRAHAM-ABIMELECH STORY IS REVISITED. ABIMELECH, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD ISAAC TO "GO AWAY", FINDS HIM AND INITIATES RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. ABIMELECH SEES THE LORD'S HAND ON ISAAC'S LIFE (LIKE IT WAS ON ABRAHAM) AND OFFERS AN "OATH" AND "COVENANT" BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM. THEY WILL DO EACH OTHER NO HARM FROM THIS POINT FORWARD. WITH A FEAST AND AN OATH, IT'S A DONE DEAL.

AND THE SECTION CLOSSES WITH ISAAC'S SERVANTS FINDING ANOTHER WATERED WELL. THE LORD IS BLESSING THE SON OF ABRAHAM IN DEED. EXCEPT, THERE'S ONE MORE DETAIL THE CHAPTER ADDS, A FORESHADOW OF THINGS TO COME.

GENESIS 26:34-35 - ESAU MARRIES

ESAU MARRIES JUDITH AND BASEMATH, TWO HITTITE WOMEN. IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE THESE TWO LADIES WERE A WELCOMED PAIR INTO THE FAMILY. WE DON'T KNOW ANYMORE ABOUT THIS INCIDENT, BUT A CHAPTER THAT SEEMED TO WORK ITSELF OUT WELL IN ISAAC'S FAVOR CONCLUDES WITH A LITTLE DETAIL ABOUT POTENTIAL TROUBLE ON THE HORIZON, SPECIFICALLY COMING FROM WITHIN THE FAMILY ITSELF. ISAAC MIGHT HAVE PEACE WITH HIS ENEMIES AND WATER IN HIS WELLS, BUT THE FAMILY DYNAMIC IS UNSETTLED.

WE'LL PAUSE OUR STORY HERE FOR NOW AND MOVE TO SOME CONCLUDING TAKEAWAYS: WHEN FAMINE HIT THE LAND DURING ABRAHAM'S TIME, GOD CALLED HIM TO LEAVE CANAAN TO GO TO EGYPT. HISTORICALLY, EGYPT WAS OFTEN ABLE TO WITHSTAND TIMES OF FAMINE (WHICH ARE CAUSED BY A LACK OF RAIN), BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE NILE RIVER. SO DURING ABRAHAM'S FAMINE, GOD ESSENTIALLY SAYS "GO TO ANOTHER, A BETTER PLACE, AND I WILL PROVIDE FOR YOU THERE." HOWEVER IN THE CASE OF ISAAC, THE LORD TELLS HIM TO STAY IN GERAR, (WHICH WAS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FAMINE STRICKEN LAND), AND THAT HE WOULD PROVIDE FOR HIM THERE. THE REST OF GENESIS 26 TELLS THE STORY OF CONTENTION AND FIGHTING OVER WELLS (THE ONLY POTENTIAL SOURCE OF WATER WHEN THERE IS A FAMINE).

THESE TWO STORIES REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUSTING GOD AND HIS WORD - DESPITE WHAT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES LOOK LIKE. IT WOULD SEEM THAT GOING TO EGYPT WHERE THERE WAS CLEAR AND OBVIOUS WATER WOULD BE THE BETTER THING TO DO IN THIS CASE. YET THE LORD SPECIFICALLY TELLS ISAAC "DO NOT GO DOWN TO EGYPT." THERE IS A FAMINE IN GERAR, ISAAC AND HIS FAMILY NEED WATER, AND GOD SAYS "DON'T GO WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS THE WATER IS (EGYPT)."

YET, WE SEE THAT ISAAC DOESN'T HESITATE AND HE DOESN'T ARGUE. BECAUSE IN THE SAME BREATH THAT THE LORD SAID "DON'T GO WHERE THE WATER IS" HE ALSO SAID "I WILL BE WITH YOU."

HERE'S THE LESSON FOR US: SOMETIMES THE LORD WORKS TO BRING US TO AN OBVIOUS PLACE THAT MAKES PLENTY OF SENSE IN LIGHT OF OUR SITUATION IN LIFE. WE NEED MONEY AND RESOURCES: WE GET A BETTER PAYING JOB. WE ARE DISCOURAGED: WE ARE GIVEN GOOD FRIENDS TO ENCOURAGE US. WE'RE ENDURING TRIAL AND SPIRITUAL ATTACKS: WE HAVE NEGATIVE PEOPLE OR INFLUENCES REMOVED. WE'RE SICK: WE GET HEALED. WE ARE UNSURE HOW TO PROCEED IN A SITUATION: WE GET QUICK ANSWERS. AND SO WE ARE RIGHT TO CONCLUDE THAT SURELY THE HAND OF GOD MUST BE ON OUR LIFE IN THOSE SITUATIONS!

AND THEN SOMETIMES THE LORD WORKS IN WAYS THAT ARE MORE COMPARABLE TO KEEPING US IN GERAR DURING THE TIME OF FAMINE. THE THINGS WE ARE EXPERIENCING DON'T MAKE "SENSE". THE RESOURCES DON'T COME. THE PROBLEMS DON'T DISAPPEAR. THE NEGATIVE PEOPLE DON'T GO AWAY. THE PAIN GETS WORSE. THE SOLUTIONS DON'T COME QUICKLY, IF AT ALL.

SOMETIMES GOD CHANGES THINGS AROUND US TO HELP US BE BETTER FOR HIM. THAT'S LIKE LEADING ABRAHAM TO EGYPT, WHERE THERE WAS WATER AND FERTILE SOIL, BECAUSE THERE WAS A FAMINE WHERE HE WAS.

SOMETIMES GOD IS WORKING TO CHANGE US ON THE INSIDE TO HELP US BETTER FOR HIM, THOUGH NOTHING AROUND US CHANGES. THAT'S LIKE TELLING ISAAC TO STAY IN GERAR, A PLACE WITH NO WATER, DURING A FAMINE, BUT ALSO TELLING HIM "I WILL BE WITH YOU, AND I WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU."

THAT BEING SAID, BOTH ABRAHAM AND ISAAC HAD CHALLENGES IN THESE TWO SIMILAR RECORDS. HOWEVER, THE CLEAR THING IS THAT IN BOTH CASES, THE PROBLEMS THAT AROSE IN BOTH MEN'S LIVES WERE A RESULT OF THEIR OWN SINS. THOSE TROUBLES WEREN'T BECAUSE GOD WASN'T WITH THEM OR TAKING CARE OF THEM. IT DIDN'T MATTER WHETHER THEY WERE IN THE LAND OF PLENTY OR THE LAND OF FAMINE - BOTH MEN LIED ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR WIVES AND THAT LED TO PROBLEMS. THAT'S AN ADDITIONAL PART OF THIS OVERALL LESSON FOR US.

HERE'S WHAT THIS ALL MEANS. **WHO WE ARE ON THE INSIDE IS WHAT REALLY MATTERS.** NOT WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE OUTSIDE. IF WE ARE CONTROLLED AND CONDITIONED BY WHAT IS GOING ON ON THE OUTSIDE, OUR FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS WILL CHANGE AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF CHANGE IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. AND CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE ALL THE TIME! LETTING OUR CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE WHO WE ARE IS A DANGEROUS AND TIRING WAY TO LIVE.

A BETTER WAY, IN FACT THE RIGHT AND GOOD WAY THAT WE OUGHT TO LIVE, IS TO LIVE DEPENDANT ON ONE CONDITION - THE LORD HAS SAID "I WILL BE WITH YOU." THAT'S THE ONE CONDITION THAT SHOULD AFFECT OUR ATTITUDES, OUR OBEDIENCE, OUR JOY, OUR CONFIDENCE AND OUR LIVES.

ISAAC HAS GOOD REASON TO TRUST AND OBEY THE LORD, EVEN WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND HIM AREN'T MAKING SENSE. THOUGH HE IS AN ADULT NOW, ISAAC SURELY REMEMBERS BEING BOUND AND PLACED ON AN ALTAR AT THE TOP OF MOUNT MORIAH WHEN HE WAS JUST A BOY. GOD HAVING A PLAN, BEYOND WHAT ISAAC CAN SEE OR FEEL, IS THE REASON HE IS ALIVE. SO ISAAC LEARNS EXPERIENTIALLY TO LIVE HIS LIFE BASED ON GOD BEING WITH HIM, NOT BY WHAT HE ASSESSES ABOUT HIS OWN SITUATION. ISAAC, LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM, IS LEARNING TO WALK BY FAITH, AND NOT BY SIGHT. AND HIS STORY, THE FAITH PART, AS WELL AS THE FLAWED PART IS HELD BEFORE US SO WE TOO KNOW WHICH WAY WE SHOULD GO.